



## **'The meane peoples capacite': writing readers in early print**

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‘The meane peoples capacite’: Writing Readers in Early Print

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Thesis submitted for PhD Degree

I declare that the material presented in this thesis is my own work

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## Abstract

This thesis examines constructions of what we might call popular readerships in early print. Focusing mainly on the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, it explores the ways in which a constituency of readers variously imagined as, for example, ‘mean’, ‘common’, or ‘simple’ are represented, instructed and discussed. As such, it is less an attempt to recover the reading habits of a particular social grouping, as rather an effort to trace contemporary attitudes towards that group’s engagement with textual productions, and, more particularly, the anxieties that the perception of that engagement provoked.

In doing so, I discuss the treatment of books and reading in an early printed conduct book, trace the attitudes of two particularly influential humanist writers, Desiderius Erasmus and Juan Luis Vives to reading, concentrating on their engagement with Bible-reading and women’s reading respectively, before examining the importance of real and imagined ‘common’ readers in the religious disputes surrounding the production of vernacular Scripture. Here, I focus on the polemical disputations between English reformists-in-exile, and their conservative opponents, through the analysis of texts by Thomas More, William Tyndale, and, particularly, William Roye and Jerome Barlowe.

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## Notes

The Abbreviation STC is used throughout to refer *A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and of English Books printed abroad, 1475-1640*, first compiled by A.W. Pollard and G.R. Redgrave, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn begun by W.A. Jackson and F.S. Ferguson, and completed by Katherine F. Pantzer, 3 vols (London: Bibliographical Society, 1976-91).

Where medieval and early modern sources are reproduced, original spellings have been retained whenever possible, although I have silently modernized contractions and archaic characters throughout.

### Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council, whose generous grant enabled me to undertake this study, and to my supervisor, Professor Julia Boffey, without whose advice, support, expertise and, above all, patience, I would have been unable to complete it.

## Introduction: Writing Readers

In ‘Reading Matter and Popular Reading’, Roger Chartier outlines the difficulties inherent in any attempt to recover ‘the unrecorded reading styles of anonymous readers’, and enumerates some of the dangers involved:

One, for example, is to take representations for actual practices; another is to restrict the category of ‘popular’ to an overly narrow social sense; a third is to reinscribe the construction of meaning within the text alone (and the object that bears the text), even after postulating its autonomy. All these are reefs that are not easy to avoid when sources are few and we take insufficient precautions.<sup>1</sup>

Chartier’s admonitions, and in particular the first amongst them, are of particular relevance to this thesis. In it, I aim to use just the sorts of ‘representations’ of reading about which Chartier counsels caution to examine not so much the *practices* of ‘popular’ reading, but rather contemporary attitudes towards – and constructions of – popular readers and the sorts of texts that it was suggested that they were reading, should be reading, or should avoid, over the half-century or so following William Caxton’s introduction of the printing-press to England in 1475 or 1476.

In responding to Chartier’s challenge, I will be drawing upon the large volume of scholarly work which, over the last two decades or so, has been engaged in attempts to construct both a ‘history of the book’ and a ‘history of reading.’<sup>2</sup> Intrinsic to much of the work within these emerging and, to some extent, convergent disciplines has been a deconstructivist reading of texts which, Kevin Sharpe and Stephen N. Zwicker argue, ‘by permanently discrediting simply

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Chartier, ‘Reading Matter and ‘Popular’ Reading’, in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, trans. by Lydia Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 283.

<sup>2</sup> A useful survey of some of the most important writers and texts in this developing field is to be found in *The Book History Reader*, ed. by David Finklestein and Alistair McCleery (London: Routledge, 2002); For a more historically specific survey, see Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer, ‘Current Trends in the History of Reading’, *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, ed. by Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2002), pp. 1-22.



positivist notions of meaning, authority and authorship, has foregrounded the reader as a central subject of study.’<sup>3</sup> In refiguring the site where meaning is made in the moment of ‘consumption’ rather than production, much of the most influential research has focused on particular case studies in which evidence for habits of reading and interpretation have been left by readers themselves. In particular, work which has focused on readers’ marginalia has appeared to offer relatively unmediated interior access to the reader in the very moment of reading and interpreting.<sup>4</sup>

But, compelling as these reconstructions are, they necessarily tend to focus on very particular, discrete classifications of readers. As Heidi Brayman Hackel notes, ‘as readers’ marginalia have emerged as a central archive for the history of reading in early modern England, that history has focused on goal-oriented, professional and contestatory readings, and it has largely elided women readers.’<sup>5</sup> That elision, as Hackel expands, exposes some of the fundamental methodological limitations in using marginalia as evidence of reading habits, since its use will ‘leave many early modern readers invisible: those whose books have not survived, those who never owned books, those who could read but not write, those who simply never felt inclined to annotate their books, and indeed those who read their books to pieces.’<sup>6</sup> And to that list we might usefully add those whose reading was confined to the more ephemeral ballads and broadsides, those who shared books without ever owning them, and the seemingly oxymoronic ‘readers who

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker, ‘Introduction: Discovering the Renaissance Reader’, in *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. by Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.1-37 (pp.1-2).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, ‘“Studied for Action”: How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy’, *Past and Present*, 129 (1990), 30-78; H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001); William Sherman, ‘What Did Renaissance Readers Write in Their Books?’, *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*, pp.119-37; Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers, 1240-1570* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Heidi Brayman Hackel, ‘“Boasting of Silence”: Women Readers in a Patriarchal State’, in Sharpe and Zwicker, *Reading*, pp. 101-121 (p.101).

<sup>6</sup> Hackel, p.107.

could not read', for, as Adam Fox's exhaustive and exhilarating exploration of the complex interrelationships between oral and literate cultures in early modern England has shown, vernacular culture of the period was, at all levels, profoundly influenced and even moulded by textual sources:

England in this period was already a society profoundly influenced by the written word at every social level, not merely in legal and administrative contexts but down to the very fabric of its forms of entertainment and imaginative expression. Even those people who could not read the handwritten or printed word for themselves traded in forms which were derived from such sources. They, too, lived within an environment structured and fashioned by text.<sup>7</sup>

The consequence, then, of these methodological limitations, is that the fascinating body of evidence which has been accrued by studies of individuals and their marginalia, is, of necessity, largely a history of a very distinct group of readers: male, educated, and literate to the extent that they were possessed of the confidence to engage in physical debate with the books that they were wealthy enough to own. Moreover, the act of making marks or notes within or beside a text can hardly be argued to be an unconscious one; readers' apparent deliberations are nothing but deliberate.

How then might we otherwise usefully 'foreground' the vast majority of early modern readers who are themselves marginalized to the point of excision by these approaches? For Naomi Conn Liebler, reader-response theory and its theoretical progeny offer a method for conceptualisation: 'Modern and postmodern critical intervention, in recognizing that the reader of text makes its meaning, perhaps unexpectedly has given us a way to project, to imagine, how early modern readers of the working classes – who left no diaries, marginalia, catalogues, or letters – might have received the stories, romances, picaresque and travel narratives.'<sup>8</sup> But that

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<sup>7</sup> Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Naomi Conn Liebler, 'Introduction: The Cultural Politics of Reading', in *Early Modern Prose Fiction: The Cultural Politics of Reading* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 1-17 (p.9).

such a course cannot be wholly satisfactory is implicit in the fictional terms with which it is expressed: we may ‘project’; we may ‘imagine’. My approach here is to attempt to negotiate a course between the access to actual reading processes that Liebler’s imaginative leaps appear to grant us, and the admittedly uncertain – indeed distorted – evidence of reading’s representation.

In attempting to navigate a passage between Chartier’s ‘reefs’ (acknowledged as a necessary manoeuvre if we are to ‘construct a better, more intelligible picture of communities of readers, publishing genres and modalities of interpretation’)<sup>9</sup> and the profound uncertainties of post-modern theory, I am steered by one of the guiding principles of Elisabeth Salter’s recent *Cultural Creativity in the Early English Renaissance*. In it, Salter examines creative self-definition amongst ‘ordinary’ people through detailed exploration of, amongst other things, their possessions, rituals and inheritance strategies. More significantly for my argument, Salter also offers a model for the analysis and assessment of surviving textual evidence able to respond to what she describes as ‘the current impasse in cultural hermeneutics’: a ‘crisis of interpretation’ in which ‘part of the impact of post-modernism, post-structuralism and critical theory’ is embodied in ‘the current atmosphere of scepticism about the nature of knowledge and an associated loss of confidence in absolute explanations.’<sup>10</sup> Salter offers a useful outline to her approach to textual evidence from the period her book addresses, which is from c.1450 to 1560:

I begin from the premise that the choices concerned with the copying of specific manuscripts as well as the particular choices concerned with which versions to print, are contingent on the cultural contexts in which these books were read. This means that choices made by copyists and printers are not isolated from choices made by readers. The combination of cultural and codicological information provides evidence for readership in more broad cultural terms than a biographical technique which tends to rely on evidence for particular book owners or compilers and the codicology of their surviving books.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Reading Matter’, p. 283.

<sup>10</sup> Elisabeth Salter, *Cultural Creativity in the Early English Renaissance: Popular Culture in Town and Country* (London: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> *Cultural Creativity*, p.138.

The contemporary texts I address here, drawn mainly, as they are, from printed material, are thus at (at least) one more remove from their originators than the evidence from wills and probates at the heart of Salter's work. Nevertheless, my contention is that the contemporary representations of popular reading and readers explored below, can, if approached with caution and with all their limitations and biases borne in mind, give us at least a tangential means of reconstructing readers.

At its most straightforward, my argument here is that from the vast range of (generally disparaging) references to the reading of, in particular, fables, ballads and romances that appear in printed works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, we may infer something of the literal popularity those works enjoyed. More particularly, however, I want to show how writers assign the reading of popular texts to a huge variety of (often conflicting) audiences, all of whom could be classified as in some way marginalized. These might include women, children, youths, the writers themselves as children and youths, the godless, the drunk, the ignorant, the socially inferior, the rustic, or, depending on the writer's own theological position, the corrupt Catholic or heretical Protestant. In doing so, and taking heed of Chartier's warning, my intention is to argue that the readers constructed in these texts are representative (sometimes literally) of very real anxieties in their authors, and that these anxieties are centred upon perceptions of an interlinked proliferation of literacy and texts. More specifically, these concerns are most frequently expressed in terms of the dangers books and texts are argued to present to these new – or at least growing – communities of readers: the 'unlearned' will misinterpret their newly available vernacular bibles; women's fragile hold upon their chastity will be broken by the erotic charge and bellicose adventure of romance; the ignorant will be unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality.

None of these fears were new, nor simply a consequence of the increase in both the availability of texts and those able to read them. The supposed connection between popular literacy and heresy was already well-established in fourteenth century England,<sup>12</sup> whilst the medieval church mounted repeated assaults on the dishonesty of romance, a genre which became, as Nicola McDonald notes, ‘in the centuries following its invention, the subject of energetic condemnation, a byword for moral degeneracy’.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, the urgency of these apprehensions, and the growing frequency with which they were expressed are, I would argue, in direct response to a burgeoning and increasingly heterogeneous readership, and the perceived promiscuity of the printing presses that both served and engendered it. Yet many such expressions owe their place in print (and indeed, in the majority of cases, their survival) to the very processes that seemingly provoked them.

In constructing my argument, I use the term ‘popular culture’, and I do so not without misgivings, nor a recognition of some of the more problematic aspects of employing a designation which lacks precision in its generalizing simplification, and, more fundamentally, is historically anachronistic. These difficulties are most thoroughly rehearsed by Peter Burke in the revised introduction to his seminal 1978 work, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, but in brief revolve around the axiological complications with which even the very terminology of the field is beset.<sup>14</sup> What, exactly, do we mean by ‘popular’? Are we referring to the ‘commonplace’, that which is ‘of the people’, or are we, as often seems to be the case, envisaging a ‘popular culture’ which is defined in opposition to that which is ‘elite’? Are we retrospectively classifying

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984); T. Wilson Hayes, ‘The Peaceful Apocalypse: Familism and Literacy in Sixteenth-Century England’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 17 (1986), 131-143 (p. 132).

<sup>13</sup> Nicola McDonald, ‘A Polemical Introduction’, in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. by Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press.), pp.1-21 (p.3).

<sup>14</sup> Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Scholar Press, 1994), pp. xiv-xxvii.

particular cultural artefacts – in this case texts – as ‘popular’, and extrapolating a perceived ‘popular’ audience for them, ignoring the fact that, as Burke argues, ‘the borderline between the cultures of the people and the cultures of the elites (which were no less various) is a fuzzy one’?<sup>15</sup>

Lori Humphrey Newcombe suggests one means by which such terminological difficulties may be circumvented:

Like many historians of the book, I now define the object of my study as ‘popular literature,’ rather than ‘popular culture’. The latter term can suggest an organic and independent popular culture existing outside of elite influences; in contrast ‘popular literature’ is by definition a product of literate practices, no matter how socially diverse, remote from elite norms, or collective they may be.

However, as Newcomb explains, the specific text to which she applies this description, Robert Greene’s *Pandosto*, is, for all its popularity, ‘unusually “literary” [...] authored by an Elizabethan “University wit,” trained in an emphatically literate tradition.’<sup>16</sup> My study, by contrast, is focused less upon particular textual productions, whether literary, popular, or a combination of both in their heritage, than upon contemporary constructions of popular readerships, which, for all their diversity, are nonetheless dependent upon their authors’ individual conception of distinct non-elite classes of cultural consumers. Early modern writers were evidently largely untroubled by the pejorative or overly-simplistic associations of the definitions under which they might aggregate these amorphous social groups, but the indistinction of the terms which they choose to describe such groups tell us rather more, I would argue, about the writers’ concerns than of their precise constituencies. Frequently, writers define them by what they are not: they are not educated, or, more specifically, they are ‘unlearned’, either in terms of schooling or manners, or in the sense of being ignoble. Such definitions in fact include individuals from a whole range of

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<sup>15</sup> Burke, *Popular Culture*, p. xvi.

<sup>16</sup> Lori Humphrey Newcomb, *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 12.

social backgrounds, from the rural labourer to the urban artisan or merchant, who would, in reality, have had no less variable levels of literacy, educational ambitions or accomplishments, and cultural predilections; catch-all descriptions such as ‘the common people’ serve to disguise the distinctions between people who may well have had very little in common. More obfuscatory still are treatments of women readers, where supposed feminine characteristics and, more importantly, sexually-defined ‘estates’ – virgin, wife, or widow – attempt to overwrite social or educational difference.

Therefore, where I do posit a connection between specific texts and the tastes of the ‘ordinary’ people, by which I mean the vast majority of the population, those who had received little or no education and who were obliged to work for a living, therefore, I refer to ‘popular cultures’ as not the historically identifiable customs and preferences of a particular social grouping, but rather as a set of cultural constructions imposed upon them. In this the notions both of the ‘commonalty’ as a discrete and definable community, and the assumption that the members of that community have a shared set of values and appetites owe their existence to the perceptions of those who write about them, since it is only in that writing that such groupings can truly be said to exist. This, then, is to designate ‘popular culture’ as an act of self-consciously external classification and appropriation, and as such it owes much to a definition suggested by

Mary Ellen Lamb:

I use the term ‘popular culture’ in yet another sense, related to its use as a social sign, to refer to a simulacrum existing in early modern imaginaries created from cultural materials assembled from various lower status groups. Especially as transmitted through written works, this popular culture associated with the festive or folk was invented and produced by elite and middling sorts as a means of coming to their own self-definition.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Ellen Lamb, *The Popular Culture of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Jonson* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.

Using Lamb's definition to remind myself that I am looking not at 'popular cultures' themselves, but at contemporary constructions of them, my thesis is formed of five chapters, each of which examines particular perceptions of readerships. In the first, I examine a book of behavioural instruction printed by William Caxton, in which, I suggest, he offers new readers lessons in conforming to an essentially conservative model of reading. In the second chapter, I undertake a consideration of the ways in which two of the most prominent humanist writers, Desiderius Erasmus and Juan Luis Vives construct models of readers and reading in their writings, before moving, in the third chapter to Erasmus's New Testament and, particularly, his exhortative promotion of popular Bible-reading. In the fourth and fifth chapters, I explore the consequences of the possibility of lay access to vernacular bibles, looking, in chapter four, at English circumstances and the print controversies between, particularly, William Tyndale and Thomas More, before concluding with an extended examination of the textual productions of two exiled English reformers, William Roye and Jerome Barlowe, whose work, I argue, is consciously aimed at and tailored to a popular English audience.



## Chapter 1: The Conduct of Reading

I want to open my thesis with William Caxton, and in particular an anonymously written poem of behavioural instruction which he printed in 1477 or 1478: the *Book of Curtesye*. Caxton and his book are important to my argument for a number of reasons as I hope to demonstrate, not least because the *Book of Curtesye* is, I will argue, a work which offers non-elite readers advice on how to read like the nobility, and because, although there is evidence of an increasing appetite for manuscript books amongst urban, merchant consumers in the fifteenth century, particularly in London,<sup>18</sup> nonetheless the advent of print did increase the availability and affordability of books. However, it would be misleading to suggest that texts in which a concern with just what it is that people are, or should be reading began with Caxton or with printing, and therefore a brief digression into historical context is first necessary.

In *The English Romance in Time*, her compelling and comprehensive examination of the genre's development, popularity and influence, Helen Cooper suggests that the frequent attacks made upon romance by both secular and religious writers can serve as a useful yardstick by which to measure both its success, and the varying degrees of anxiety that the reading and hearing of romance could provoke:

evidence from contemporary preachers, moralists, and cultural commentators throughout the half millennium of the dominance of romance gives us not only lists of the most popular romances, but also an indication of how the genre veered from disapproval to approval and back again, as historical, and in particular religious circumstances changed.

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<sup>18</sup> See Julia Boffey and Carol M. Meale, 'Selecting the text: Rawlinson C.86 and some other books for London readers', in *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts: Essays Celebrating the Publication of 'Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English'*, ed. by Felicity Riddy (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), pp. 143-70.

‘Secular fiction had’, Cooper continues ‘been condemned by Christian writers ever since Augustine deplored his greater readiness to weep over Dido’s sufferings than over Christ’s’,<sup>19</sup> and that same censorious imperative can be traced in English writing at least as far back as the end of the eighth century. In 797, Alcuin of York wrote a letter to Speratus, bishop of an unspecified English see, containing a rebuke often cited as symbolising the perceived incompatibility between consuming narratives of pagan heroism, such as *Beowulf* and *Widsith*, and the sober study of scriptures to which the religious should devote themselves:

Let the Word of God be read at the clergy’s meals. There it is proper to hear the reader, not the harpist; the sermons of the Fathers, not the songs of the heathens. What has Ingeld to do with Christ? The house is narrow, it cannot hold them both. The King of heaven will have no fellowship with so-called kings who are pagan and damned, for the Eternal King reigns in Heaven, while the pagan is damned and laments in Hell. The voices of readers should be heard in your houses, not the crowd of revellers in the streets.<sup>20</sup>

For Alcuin, then, the literary culture of the monastic house must be entirely scriptural; it has, and is, no place to accommodate the secular stories of the damned which wash against its walls, and pious and pagan writings are as mutually exclusive as heaven and hell, or, implicitly, Latin and the vernacular. Alcuin’s is a straightforward rejection of the ‘songs of the heathens’.

However, for religious writers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the popular literature against which they ranged themselves, although worldly, was not necessarily pagan, but rather the broad, secular, vernacular church of romance. Criticism of romance, and in particular a trope in which more or less lengthy lists of material disapproved of introduce that which is deemed more suitable appears to have arrived in England through Anglo-Norman

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<sup>19</sup> Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Roy M. Liuzza, ‘Beowulf: monuments, memory, history’, in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. by David F. Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 91-108 (p. 102); the context and addressee of the letter are explored in detail in Donald A. Bullough, ‘What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne?’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 22 (1993), 93-125.

sources.<sup>21</sup> A version of the construction appears in the anonymous *Le Miroir du Monde*, a vernacular treatment of vices and virtues produced written in northeast France, probably in the 1270s.<sup>22</sup> The author of *Le Miroir* decries those ‘qui onques ne treuvent courte messe ne longue fable; qui plus volentiers oient de Parceval et de Rollant ou d’Olivier’, which the Middle English translation of *Le Miroir* renders as ‘tho that fonde nevir short messe ne longe fable, whiche gladlyer wil hire speke of Parceval or of Roulond or Olyver.’<sup>23</sup>

The formula, in which the pleasures of romance are both acknowledged and simultaneously decried, is repeated almost to the point of cliché in Middle English texts. The thirteenth-century *South English Legendary*, for example, opens by suggesting that, ‘Men wilneth muche to hure tell of bataille of kynge / And of knightes that hardy were that muchedel is lesynge’, before attempting to convince its readers that no less exciting material will be found in its hagiography:

Wo so wilneth muche to hure tales of suche thinge  
 Hardi batailles he may hure here that is no lesinge  
 Of apostles & martirs that hardy knightes were  
 That studeuast were in bataille & ne fleide noght for fere<sup>24</sup>

The Middle English ‘Mirror’, a prose version of Robert de Gretham’s verse sermon cycle *Miroir* wishes for none of the associations with romance claimed by the *South English Legendary*, preferring instead to draw a sharp distinction between holy writings and men’s vanities. It is, the

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<sup>21</sup> On this, and the relationship between Anglo-Norman and Middle English romance, see Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> See *The Mirroure of the Worlde: A Middle English Translation of Le Miroir du monde*, ed. by Robert R. Raymo and Elaine E. Whitaker, with the assistance of Ruth E. Sternglantz (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 6-11.

<sup>23</sup> *Le Mireour du Monde*, ed. by Félix Chavannes (Lausanne: Georges Bridel, 1845), p. 56; *Mirroure of the Worlde*, p. 96.

<sup>24</sup> *The South English Legendary*, ed. by Charlotte D’Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, 2 vols, Early English Text Society, original series, vols 235-6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 3.

*Miroir* declares, ‘ydelschyp’ that ‘many men hyt ben that han inwylle to heren rede romaunces & gestes’, since ‘they ben contoued thorw mannes wytte that setten her hertes to folyes & trofles’:

Loke now to Tristrem, other of Gy of Warrewyk, or of ony other, & thu ne schalt fynde non that ther nys many lesynges & gret. Ffor they ben nought drawen owt of holy wryt, but iche man that maketh hem enformeth hem aftur the wylle of his herte, & thenketh that it is al soth. & no for than al is uanyte for to here alle suche thyngus and undurstand hem that the soule ne may no gode leren. Ffor alle thyng that doth no god to the sowle byfore God is nought worth.<sup>25</sup>

Famously, William Nassington’s fourteenth-century *Speculum Vitae* (c. 1348-70), a translation of Lorens of Orleans’s *Somme le Roi*, is introduced with a stern caution, ‘I warne yhow first at the bygynnyng, / I wil make na vayne carpyng / Of dedes of armes ne of amours, / Als dose mynstraylles and iestours’. Although people may love to hear of the adventures of Octavian and Isumbras, of Bevis and Guy of Warwick, Nassington declares, particularly at feasts, he will not speak of them, holding them as ‘noght bot vanyte’.<sup>26</sup> An analogous, although more exhaustive dismissive directory of secular romance serves as prologue to the *Cursor Mundi* whose writer acknowledges the fact that ‘man yhernes rimes for to here, / And romans red on maneres sere,’ before recounting a comprehensive list of precisely which those ‘rimes’ and ‘romans’ are:

Of Alisaundur the conquerour;  
Of Iuly Cesar the emparour;  
O grece and troy the strang strijf,  
There many thosand lesis ther lijf;  
O brut that bern bald of hand,  
The first conqueror of Ingland;  
O kyng arthour that was so rike;  
Quam non in hys tim was like,  
O ferlys that hys knythes fell,

<sup>25</sup> *The Middle English ‘Mirror’, An Edition Based on Bodleian Library MS Holkham misc. 40*, with an introduction and glossary by Kathleen Marie Blumreich (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in collaboration with Brepols, 2002), pp.1-2.

<sup>26</sup> William of Nassington: *Speculum Vitae: A Reading Edition*, ed. by Ralph Hanna, 2 vols, Early English Text Society, original series vols 331-2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1, p. 6; On the relationship between *La Somme le Roi* and its English translations, see Leo M. Carruthers, *La Somme la Roi de Lorens d’Orléans et ses Traductions Anglaise: étude comparative* (Paris: Société des anciens textes Français, 1980).

That aunter sere I here of tell,  
 Als wawan, cai and other stabell,  
 For to were the ronde tabell;  
 How charles kyng and rauland faght,  
 Wit sarazins wald thai na saght;

[Of] tristrem and hys leif ysote,  
 How he for here be-com a sote,  
 O Ionek and of ysambrase,  
 O ydoine and of amadase  
 Storis als o ferekin thinges  
 O princes, prelates and o kynges;<sup>27</sup>

And whilst religious writers may dismiss the heroes of French and English literature in favour of sacred texts, the anonymous author of the *Laud Troy Book* undertakes a similar manoeuvre in promoting the value of his translation of Guido delle Colonne's 1287 *Historia destructionis Troiae* as a tale of heroism far superior:

Many speken of men that romaunces rede  
 That were sumtyme doughti in dede,  
 The while that god hem lyff lente,  
 That now ben dede and hennes wente:  
 Off Bevis, Gy, and of Gauwayn,  
 Off kyng Ricard, & of Owayn,  
 Off Tristram, and of Percyuale,  
 Off Rouland Ris, and Aglauale,  
 Off Archeroun, and of Octouian,  
 Off Charles, & of Cassibaldan,  
 Off Hauelock, Horne, & of Wade;-  
 In Romaunces that of hem ben made  
 That gestoures often dos of hem gestes  
 At Mangeres and at grete ffestes.  
 Here dedis ben in remembraunce  
 In many fair Romaunce;  
 But of the worthiest wyght in wede  
 That euere by-strod any stede,  
 Spekes no man, ne in romaunce redes  
 Off his batayle ne of his dedis.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Cursor Mundi: a Northumbrian Poem of the XIVth Century, in Four Versions*, ed. by Richard Morris, 3 vols, Early English Text Society, original series, vols 57, 59, 62, 66, 68, 99, 101 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961-66), I, pp. 8-10.

<sup>28</sup> *The Laud Troy Book: a Romance of about 1400 AD*, with introduction, notes and glossary by J. Ernst Wülfing (London: London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., for the Early English Text Society, 1902), p. 1; For the

However, whilst the frequency with which versions of this trope recur in Middle English writings might appear to suggest a long-standing and deeply-held concern with popular reading, some caution needs to be exercised in its interpretation. Although the texts referred to are almost always described as popular, in the sense of being enjoyed by many people, it is far less clear that the audiences of readers and hearers addressed can be conceived of as such. The readership of medieval romances, as no less the writings in which they are criticized, is, of course, extremely difficult to establish, but there is no sense in these disapproving writings that romances are associated with a particular social group, and still less, with the commonalty. Later writers employing the same device frequently make an explicit association between the texts of which they disapprove and the 'lower orders', as we shall see, but that relationship is nowhere implied in these earlier versions. Indeed, given the expense that would be incurred by the production of texts as lengthy as, for example, the *Cursor Mundi*, or the *South English Legendary*, it seems likely that their strictures are addressed to elite audiences. Moreover, the fact that the formula is so closely followed in different works in terms of its introductory position, its admission of its target texts' popularity, and the specific tales and romances of which it disapproves, suggests that it is a literary convention, a well-worn generic motif rather than an expression of pressing concern.

Against this background, the coming of print predicates something new in writers' consideration of readers: a desire not simply to reprove, but also to instruct a new reading audience in both what to read, and, just as importantly, how to read it. And whilst that new audience, initially at least, is no more plebian than those romance-readers addressed above, neither is drawn from the traditional elite. An awareness of that audience's needs, I would

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dating of the *Laud Troy Book*, see James Simpson, 'The Other Book of Troy: Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* in Fourteenth-and Fifteenth-Century England', *Speculum* 73, 2 (1998), 397-423 (pp. 404-5).

suggest, informs many of the publication and editorial decisions made by England's early printers, and one of the locations in which that awareness may most easily be discerned is in literature which aims to provide behavioural instruction: the genre of didactic writing loosely defined by modern scholarship as 'conduct' literature.

For the first generation of English printers, establishing their businesses in late-fifteenth century London, the conduct book proved a publishing staple. The product of a long-established medieval tradition of preceptive writing, its origins lay in pedagogical works written for royal and aristocratic children, domestic advice to parents and patriarchs, and more general works of religious admonition and edification. The texts that populate this genre can, to some extent, be represented as behavioural guide-books, offering their readers practical lessons in social and religious manners and etiquette. Simultaneously they serve to iterate and reinforce societal codes and mores. On some occasions they are directly addressed to juvenile readers, but far more frequently they are directed to male heads of households, offering guidance in both personal moral and religious practice, and in the governance of wives, children and servants.

From its origins in largely elite, courtly circles, the production of conduct manuals had, by the late medieval period, proliferated to such an extent that they had become, as Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark note, 'positively fashionable.'<sup>29</sup> This proliferation was the consequence of a number of interlinked factors which, in combination, resulted in an audience for conduct literature which by the late fifteenth century was increasingly heterogeneous. In Claire Sponsler's view, this can be attributed to cheaper production costs and increased literacy:

As paper replaced parchment, books became cheaper and more widely available over the course of the fifteenth century; the advent of printing in England in 1476 significantly speeded these processes of wider dissemination of written texts. At the

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<sup>29</sup> Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark, 'Medieval Conduct: Texts, Theories, Practices', in *Medieval Conduct*, ed. by Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. ix-xx (p. xiv).

same time, those who had learned to read for business purposes now sought other kinds of reading material, especially works offering entertainment and education. The market for books in England during the late Middle Ages thus included a socially broad buying public to whom publishers provided ever cheaper and more readily available books.<sup>30</sup>

More specifically, both Sponsler, and Ashley and Clark argue that the increased circulation of conduct literature during this period was a consequence of its appropriation by an emergent 'bourgeoisie', an urban readership 'for whom possessing conduct books became a marker of its ascendancy.'<sup>31</sup> However, this should not be to suggest that conduct books simply served as inert markers of class aspiration; they simultaneously provided guidance for that emergent bourgeoisie as parents, offering them persuasive advice on the best way to raise children able to adapt to new and unfamiliar social positions. Whether wishing to prepare their children for possible future employment in noble households, or to ensure that their behaviour and tastes might serve to signify a discrete and elevated social distinction, conduct books appeared to offer definitive direction.

An expansion in the market for conduct literature certainly appears to have been recognized by early English printers like William Caxton, Wynkyn de Worde and Richard Pynson, from whose presses were issued multiple editions of texts principally concerned with social or religious protocol. In these, as elsewhere, Caxton in particular seems to have realised the commercial opportunities of appealing to both the aristocratic audiences, who might be considered their 'traditional' market, and an aspirational mercantile audience. The latter group, Tracy Adams argues:

would have been particularly susceptible to the appeal of his conduct books, in part because contemporary literature offered them no obvious basis for a positive group identity of their own, for a shared set of ideals specific to merchants, in the way

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<sup>30</sup> Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 54.

<sup>31</sup> *Medieval Conduct*, p. xv.



chivalric literature offered the nobility a system of values [...] More interested in upward social movement than in constructing an independent group identity that stressed their ties to commerce, merchants of fifteenth-century England seem to have been happy to assume aristocratic reading habits as their own.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, Adams goes further, suggesting that Caxton not only recognizes a new and lucrative market of readers to be exploited in this emergent order, but actively cultivates it, using his prologues and epilogues ‘to show these readers how to assimilate the products he offers them, even as he simultaneously addresses an aristocratic public.’<sup>33</sup> The degree of agency one ascribes to Caxton’s publishing choices will, necessarily, always be contestable, since issues of, for example, the availability of particular texts or prevailing tastes are likely to have played as great a role as more deliberate marketing strategies. Nonetheless, whilst much of the scholarly investigation of Caxton’s publication choices has tended to view the process as essentially derivative – one in which Caxton merely introduces an interested bourgeoisie to a well-established canon of literature enjoyed by aristocratic English and Burgundian readers – more recent work has, as William Kuskin notes, ‘acknowledged Caxton’s more active role in shaping literary culture.’<sup>34</sup>

Although, as Adams argues, it is principally in his prologues and epilogues that Caxton offers his non-aristocratic readers guidance in the act of reading itself, the anonymous text known as the *Book of Curtesye*, which he published in 1477 or 1478 is unusual, offering as it

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<sup>32</sup> Tracy Adams, ‘“Noble, wyse and grete lordes, gentilmen and marchauntes”: Caxton’s Prologues as Conduct Books for Merchants’, *Parergon*, 22 (2005), 53-76 (pp.55-56).

<sup>33</sup> ‘Caxton’s Prologues’, p. 55; see also Barbara Belyea, ‘Caxton’s Reading Public’, *English Language Notes*, 19 (1981), 14-19.

<sup>34</sup> William Kuskin, ‘Caxton’s Worthies Series: The Production of Literary Culture’, *English Literary History*, 66 (1999), 511-551 (p. 541, n. 1). Kuskin’s comment comes within a useful summary of what he calls ‘the common wisdom on William Caxton’, and work offering a challenge to that view (p. 511). For more recent analyses, see, for example, Dorsey Armstrong, ‘Gender and the Script/Print Continuum: Caxton’s *Morte Darthur*’, *Essays in Medieval History*, 21 (2005), 133-150; Jenny Adams, ‘“Longene to the Playe”: Caxton, Chess, and the Boundaries of Political Order’, *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 21 (2005), 133-166; Yu-Chiao Wang, ‘Caxton’s Romances and their Early Tudor Readers’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 67 (2004), 173-188.

does direct, internal advice on both what, and how to read.<sup>35</sup> Generically similar to John Lydgate's *Stans Puer ad Mensam*, an edition of which Caxton produced during the same period,<sup>36</sup> the *Book of Curtesye* is for the most part concerned with inculcating appropriate behaviour in its addressee, 'lytyl Iohn.' The author makes both the purpose of and the necessity for his treatise explicit in the opening stanzas:

lytyl Iohn syth your tendre enfancye  
 Stondeth as yet vnder / in difference  
 To vice or vertu to meyn or applye  
 And in suche age ther is no prouidence  
 Ne comenly no sad Intelligence  
 But as waxe resseyueth prynte or fygure  
 So children ben disposid of nature

Vyce or vertue to folowe and enpresse  
 In mynde / and therfore / to styre & remeue  
 You from vice / and to vertu addresse  
 That one to folowe / and that other teshewe  
 I haue deuysed you / this lytyl newe  
 Instruction / acordyng vnto your age  
 Playne in sentence / but playner in langage (ll. 1-14)

Much of this 'newe instruction' concerns matters of personal hygiene, with such essential advice as, for example 'Purge your nose / lete noman in it see / The vile mater / it is none honeste' (ll. 39-40), and with injunctions to the observance of the proprieties of behaviour at church, school and table, tropes familiar from texts like *Stans Puer ad Mensam*. However, the *Book of Curtesye* is also expressly interested in education, and its socially-civilizing effects, arguing that Iohn should 'Lerneth to be vertuous / and wel thewed' since 'Who wil not lerne / nedely he must be lewed' (ll. 20-1). Moreover, whilst general exhortations to diligent study are not uncommon in conduct literature, the author of the *Book of Curtesye* spends considerable time in promoting the

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<sup>35</sup> Anon, *Book of Curtesye* (London: William Caxton, 1477-8) (STC 3303), reprinted as *Caxton's Book of Curtesye*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall, Early English Text Society, extra series, vol. 3 (London: N. Trübner, 1868). Quotations follow this edition.

<sup>36</sup> John Lydgate, *Stans Puer ad Mensam* (London: William Caxton, 1476?) (STC 17030).

social benefits that the careful study of literature can afford. 'Excercise your self also in redyng', he entreats, 'Of bookes enorned with eloquence', since:

Ther shal ye fynde / bothe plesir & lernyng  
So that ye may / in euery good presence  
Somwhat fynde / as in sentence  
That shal acorde / the tyme to occupy  
That ye not nede / to stonden ydelly (ll. 309-15)

The programme of study that the author recommends consists of a well-established tradition of vernacular poets, 'hem that were / Famous in our langage, these faders dere / Whos soules in blysse, god eternal auaunce / That lysten so our langage to enhaunce' (ll. 431-3): Gower, Chaucer, Hoccleve and Lydgate. And the advantages that familiarity with the quartet's literary and rhetorical techniques will afford Iohn are as much practical as aesthetic:

It is fayr / for to be comynycatyf  
In maters vnto purpose acordynge  
So that a wyght exersyf  
For trusteth wel / it is a tedyous thyng  
For to here a chylde / multeplye talkyng  
Yf it be not to the purpose applied  
Ande also with / goodly termys alyede (ll. 316-22)

By reading 'these faders dere', then, Iohn will not only absorb the literary tastes of the elite, but also their manner of speech; the poets' writing will teach him lessons in oratorical breviloquence, circumspection and pertinence. Gower, Iohn is told, 'shal gyue you corage / He is so ful of fruyt. sentence and langage' (ll. 328-9), whilst Chaucer is 'fader and founder of ornate eloquence / That enlumened hast alle our bretayne' (ll. 330-1) whose 'langage was so fayr and pertynente / It seemeth vnto mannes heerynge / Not only the worde / but verely the thyng' (ll. 341-3). Furthermore, whilst the author recommends Hoccleve for his 'goodly langage and sentence passing wyse' (l. 352), he reserves his highest tribute for Lydgate, his 'maister', of whom he

states ‘Me lacketh witte, I haue none eloquence / to gyue hym lawde, after his excellence / For I dar saye, he lefte hym nat a lyue / That coude his connyng, sufficiently descriue’ (ll. 389-92).<sup>37</sup>

As Mark Addison Amos notes, the *Book of Curtesye* is not simply engaged with the explicit promotion of ‘only insular poets, and only their English-language texts’, but also goes beyond giving lessons in reading in order to suggest an altogether more sophisticated reading process:

Seche ye therfore / and in caas ye fynde  
Such gleynors fressh as haue some apparence  
Of fayr langage / yet take hem and vnbynde  
And preue ye / what they be in existence  
Colourd in langage / sauerly in sentence  
And doubte not my childe / withoute drede  
It will prouffite to see suche thingis & red (ll. 421-7)

For Amos, ‘this curriculum goes beyond pastime reading to avoid idleness’, but rather ‘offers texts in English to those seeking to increase their cultural capital, both to those seeking to protect their cultural capital and to those investing in a cultural capital not theirs by birth.’<sup>38</sup> The ‘cultural capital’ which Amos sees being appropriated here comprises both particular standards and conventions of behaviour to which one should subscribe, and also a literary component – a canonical group of medieval, native writers, whose vernacular compositions are ‘famous in our langage.’ And the lesson that those writers can teach is the art of reading, and therefore speaking, well.

In doing so, the *Book of Curtesye* provides an early printed example of a version of a commonplace of medieval and early modern literary criticism, in which, as Glenn A. Steinberg

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<sup>37</sup>The description of Chaucer as ‘fader and founder of ornate eloquence’ is, as N. F. Blake has pointed out, borrowed and adapted by Caxton himself in the epilogue to his edition of Boethius’ *Consolations of Philosophy*, becoming ‘the worshipful fader & first foundeur & enbelissher of ornate eloquence in our englissh’ (N. F. Blake, *William Caxton and English Literary Culture* (London & Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1991), p. 157).

<sup>38</sup>Mark Addison Amos, ‘“For Manners Make Man”: Bourdieu, De Certeau, and the Common Appropriation of Noble Manners in the *Book of Courtesy*’, in Ashley and Clark, pp. 23-48 (pp.41-42).

notes, ‘Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate form a kind of poetic trinity to whom everyone gives homage.’<sup>39</sup> The establishment of this tradition owes much to Hoccleve and Lydgate themselves. Hoccleve’s 1411 *Regiment of Princes*, for example, speaks of ‘My maister Chaucer, flour of eloquence, / Mirour of fructuous entendement’ and ‘my maistir Gower [...] / Whos vertu I am insufficient / For to descryve.’<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Lydgate’s poetry is frequently concerned with what J. A. Dane and J. B. Beesemyer have described as his ‘attempts to situate himself as the disciple of Chaucer and to establish a canon of English poets comparable to those on the continent.’<sup>41</sup>

The formulation was employed in a variety of fifteenth-century poetic compositions, often serving as a sort of double-edged self-effacement, in which the poet ostensibly apologises for the fact that he cannot ascend the literary heights occupied by these great poets, whilst simultaneously placing himself amongst their company. It appears, for example, in James I of Scotland’s *Kingis Quair* (c. 1424), which ends with a dedication ‘Vnto [th’]inpnis of my maisteris dere, / Gowere and Chaucere, that on the steppis satt / Of rethorike quhill thai were lyvand here, / Superlatiue as poetis laureate / In moralitee and eloquence ornat’, and recurs with notable frequency in both poetry and criticism of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, from Caroline Spurgeon’s *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Illusion*, Andrew Higl has collected ‘in texts dated between 1500 and 1600 [...] 14 instances where

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<sup>39</sup> Glenn A. Steinberg, ‘Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar* and the Elizabethan Reception of Chaucer’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 35 (2005), 31-51 (pp. 33-34); Steinberg provides twenty-eight examples of sixteenth-century writers ‘who honor Chaucer along with Gower and/or Lydgate’ (p.34, n.6).

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Hoccleve, *The Regiment of Princes*, ed. by Charles R. Blyth (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), p. 96; on the gradual exclusion of Hoccleve ‘from the literary tradition that he himself did so much to formulate’, see John M. Bowers, ‘Thomas Hoccleve and the Politics of Tradition’, *Chaucer Review*, 36 (2002), 352-369.

<sup>41</sup> J. A. Dane and J. B. Beesemyer, ‘The Denigration of John Lydgate: Implications of Printing History’, *English Studies*, 81 (2000), 117-126 (p. 118).

<sup>42</sup> James I of Scotland, *The Kingis Quair*, ed. by John Norton-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 50.

Lydgate and Chaucer are mentioned together, 16 where Gower and Chaucer are mentioned together, and 18 where Lydgate, Chaucer, and Gower are mentioned together.’<sup>43</sup>

However, almost all of these references occur not in instructional texts, but in self-consciously ‘literary’ works, works which tend to represent Chaucer and (to a lesser extent) Gower and Lydgate as the ‘founding fathers’ of English poetry, amongst whose company both aspiring and established poets seek to place themselves. Perhaps the most famous example of this is found in John Skelton’s *Garlande of Laurell*. Thought to have been composed around 1495, and echoing Chaucer’s *House of Fame*, the poem recounts a dream-vision, in which the Queen of Fame co-opts Skelton into a roster ‘of poetis laureat of many dyuerse nacyons’ (l. 324).<sup>44</sup> Amongst the roll-call of eminent writers that extends in a fixed lineage from Antiquity, Skelton espies:

Gower, that first garnissed our Englysshe rude,  
And maister Chaucer, that nobly enterprysed  
How that our Englysshe myght fresshely be ennewed;  
The monke of Bury then after them ensuyd,  
Dane Johnn Lydgate. Theis Englysshe poetis thre,  
As I ymagenyd, repayrid vnto me,

Togeder in armes, as brethern, enbrasid;  
There apparell farre passynge beyonde that I can tell;  
With diamantis and rubis there tabers were trasid,  
None so ryche stones in Turkey to sell;  
Thei wantid nothyng but the laurell. (388-97)

The trio are similarly elevated by William Dunbar, who, in his role of poet at court to James IV of Scotland, occupied an equivalent post to that held by Skelton in England. Like the *Garlande of Laurell*, Dunbar’s *Goldyn Targe* recounts a poet’s dream-vision, though in this case the

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<sup>43</sup> Caroline Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925); Andrew Higl, ‘Printing Power: Selling Lydgate, Gower, and Chaucer’, *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 23 (2006), 57-77 (p. 57).

<sup>44</sup> John Skelton, ‘A ryght delectable tratyse upon a goodly Garlande or Chapelet of Laurell’, in *John Skelton: The Complete English Poems*, ed. by John Scattergood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 312-58). Line numbers follow this edition.

encounter is with the court of Venus and an allegorized lesson in which Love overpowers Reason. In the poem's closing stanzas, Dunbar adopting this 'modesty topos', praises Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate, imagining what the poem might have become in their hands:

O reuerend Chaucere rose of rethoris all,  
As in oure tong and flour imperiall  
That raise in Britane, evir quho redis ryght,  
Thou beris of makaris the tryumph riall;  
Thy fresch anamalit termes celicall  
That mater coud illumynit haue full bryght:  
Was thou nouth of oure inglissh all the lycht,  
Surmounting eviry tong terrestriall  
Alls fer as Mayes morow dois mydnycht?

O morall Gower and Ludgate laureate,  
Your sugurit lippis and tongis aureate  
Bene to oure eris cause of grete delyte;  
Your angel mouthis most mellifluate  
Oure rude langage has clere illumynate,  
And fair ourgilt oure spech that imperfyte  
Stude or your goldyn pennis schupe to write;  
This ile before was bare and desolate  
Off rethorike, Or lusty fresch endyte. (ll. 253-70)<sup>45</sup>

Interestingly, a partial version of the invocation appears in a text printed by Caxton soon after he published the *Book of Curtesye*. In the anonymous work of Christian allegory *Curia Sapientiae* or *The Court of Sapience*, the author contrasts the 'bytternesse' of his own book with the 'wrytyng more delycyous' of 'other auctours whiche ben gloryous':

Gower, Chaucers, erthely goddes two,  
Ofthyrst of eloquent delycacye,  
With al youre successours fewe or moo,  
Fragraunt in speche, experte in poetrye,  
You, ne yet theym, in no poynt I envye;  
Exyled as fer I am from youre glorie  
As nyght from day, or deth from vycторыe; (ll. 50-6)<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> William Dunbar, 'The Goldyn Targe' in *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. by James Kinsley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 29-38. Dunbar makes a similar invocation of the triumvirate in 'Timor Mortis conturbat me' (pp. 178-81, ll.50-1).

Although Lydgate is missing from the group in this example, authorship of *The Court of Sapience* itself has been regularly, though erroneously, assigned to him since at least as early as Stephen Hawes' *The Pastime of Pleasure* (c. 1505 or 1506).<sup>47</sup> Caxton's edition, unfortunately, gives no indication of whether the same attribution was held twenty-five years earlier, but it remains at least a speculative possibility. Whilst Caxton's edition remains silent on the subject of the authorship of *The Court of Sapience*, the same is true for many of the other editions of Lydgate's work he was producing at the same time.<sup>48</sup>

The reading suggested by the *Book of Curtesye*, then, privileges a well-established vernacular canon with a self-conscious echoing of values more commonly expressed in the works of courtly poets, or poets with courtly ambitions. As with much of Caxton's output, it couches its appeal for an aspirational, new readership within a text apparently aimed at a more elevated audience. Nonetheless, even this 'double-audience' could hardly be described as extensive, and even whilst apparently addressing an audience of new or aspirational readers, the writers that it promotes are long-established mainstays of English elite audiences' tastes. The *Book of Curtesye*'s reading-lessons function in exactly the same way as its other behavioural instructions, teaching Iohn to emulate aristocratic manners and mores. Rather than what Iohn might be reading, or how he might be reading it, the *Book of Curtesye*'s is a straightforwardly didactic concern with telling him what he *should* be reading. And whilst it is fulsome in its praise for the authors it promotes, their value is no less pedagogic: the 'prouffite' for Iohn 'to see suche thingis & red' (l. 4217) lies not in his aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of their verse, nor in

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<sup>46</sup> Anon *Curia Sapientiae* (London: William Caxton, 1480) (STC 17015); *The Court of Sapience*, ed. by E. Ruth Harvey (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1984). Quotation is from the modern edition.

<sup>47</sup> *Court of Sapience*, p. xxi.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, *Stans Puer ad Mensam*; *The Chorle and the Birde* (1477, STC 17008); *The Horse the Ghoos the Sheep* (1477, STC 17018); *The Temple of Glas* (1477, STC 17032). By contrast, Caxton's edition of Lydgate's *The Lyf of Our Lady* (1484, STC 17023) does begin 'tHis book was compyled by dan Iohn lydgate monke of burye' (1<sup>st</sup> quire r).



the pleasure of reading for its own sake, but in improving his own expression through their imitation.

The specific instruction on canon and method presented in Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* might be characterized as 'old lessons for new readers'. Here, as in his prologues and epilogues, and, in a more general sense, in his publication choices, Caxton advances a traditional, courtly model of literary taste to a non-aristocratic (though by no means plebeian) readership. The arrival of the printing press in England is a transformative moment, at least in terms of the concomitant innovations in book production and distribution it brought. But the programmes and practices of reading recommended in the *Book of Curtesye* are essentially conservative, reflecting and reproducing the tastes of 'manuscript culture' rather than replacing them.

Nevertheless, whilst Caxton's edition of the *Boke of Curtesye* might appear to be solely concerned with what readers *should* be reading, that which they should aspire to, elsewhere, in two of his translations, Caxton does briefly touch upon the obverse, that which they *should not*. In 1483 or 1484, Caxton published an edition of Benedict Burgh's translation of the *Distichs of Cato*, to which he added 'many a fayr lernynge and notable ensamples' which he himself had translated from a French manuscript *Caton*.<sup>49</sup> Under the proverb '*Multa legas facito perlectis perlege multa Nam miranda canunt sed non credenda poetae*',<sup>50</sup> Caxton's translation expands upon the risks that the works of poets present, in particular, to children:

it is good and prouffitable to knowe bothe good and euyl / but thou oughtest not to byleue al that thou shalte rede / by cause that the poetes and many other sayen and rehercen many fables and thynges meruayllous / And for thys cause none ought for to be curyous of the lore and doctryne of these poetes the whyche are ful of fables and lesynges / Valere sayth that by especyal the yonge children ought to flee the doctryne

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<sup>49</sup> *Here begynneth the prologue or prohemye of the booke callid Caton...* (London: William Caxton, 1483/4) (STC 4853); *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, ed. by W. J. B. Crotch (London: Humphrey Milford, 1928), pp. 76-7.

<sup>50</sup> 'See to it that you read much, having read forget much; for poets write a lot of miraculous, but not believable, things.'

of the poetes / by cause that they byleue of lyght al that they heren or seen / and  
therefore thou oughtest to studye of al scyences & to withholden in thy mynde the  
good & flee the euyl.<sup>51</sup>

Caxton's translation does not forbid, or even oppose the reading of fiction, therefore, but presents it as an especial danger to the young, unformed mind, unable to discriminate between truths and tales. Therefore, they must be fortified by studying the truths of the 'scyences' – presumably the seven liberal arts – and learn to reject the 'euyl' before they may safely be let loose upon poets 'fables and lesynges'.

Caxton includes a similar consideration of the risks incurred by the reading of falsehoods in his translation of *Le livre de bonnes moeurs* by Jacobus Magni (also known as Jacques Legrand). Caxton opens his *Book of Good Manners*, as his translation is titled, with a prologue which precisely positions the proceeding text, explaining both its purpose and its derivation. Caxton has, he says, been occupied in considering 'the condycions & maners of the comyn people.' The need for this conduct book is clear to him, since those 'comyn people [...] without enformacion & lernyng ben rude and not manerd lyke vnto beestis brute'. Fortunately for Caxton, a recently deceased friend, 'a Mercer of london named wylliam praat', had, shortly before his death:

delyuerd to me in frenshe a lytel book named the book of good maners [...] and  
desyred me Instantly to translate it in to englyssh our maternal tonge to thende that it  
myght be had and vsed emonge the people for thamendement of their maners. and to  
thencease of vertuous lyuyng.

Caxton, he says, promptly followed his friend's request, and translated the book. It is here that Caxton reveals the scope of the audience that both he and his friend hoped would learn from the book: Caxton prays that the book 'may prouffyte bothe the redars & herers therof', repeating this plea in the prologue's closing lines:

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<sup>51</sup> *Caton*, sig. G6v.

I beseche almyghty god that it so may be vnderstonden that al they that shal rede or here it / that they may the better lyue in this present lyf that after this lyf they & I may come to the euerlastyng lyf in heuen where as is Ioye and blysse perd[u]rable Amen.<sup>52</sup>

Here, then, we are able to see Caxton positioning the *Book of Good Maners* for an audience of ‘comyn people’, and whilst that might simply indicate that he addresses it to those without the nobility, the fact that he hopes it will be efficacious for both readers and hearers suggests that he aims it towards an audience broad enough to encompass both the literate and the illiterate.

However, despite this apparent breadth of intended audience outlined in Caxton’s prologue, the *Book* itself has little to say about the commonalty’s reading. Parents are instructed to guide their children in matters moral and spiritual, but there is no indication or suggestion that their education might include any encounter with the written word.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the *Book of Good Maners* does tackle what it portrays as bad reading habits, but these are the reading habits not of the commons, but of the clergy. In a chapter entitled, ‘How men of the chyrche ought to estudye and to lerne singulerly the holy scrypture’, ignorant and lazy ‘men of the chyrche’ are berated for their failure to diligently study:

they haue tyme and season ynough for to studye and to gete connyng and scyence.  
And yf they employed the tyme for to studye / the whiche they employe in vanytees.  
they shold be clerkes And shold haue more Ioye and playsir in theyr estudye / than  
they haue in vanytees / the whyche they mayntene.<sup>54</sup>

Those not amongst the clergy, the *Book* suggests, need not occupy themselves with reading: ‘all may not be clerkes’, and therefore those that choose ‘the lyf Actif / maye by that manere excuse them.’<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Prologues and Epilogues of Caxton*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>53</sup> Jacobus Magni/Jacques Legrand, *Here begynneth the table of a book entytled the book of good maners* (London: William Caxton, 1487) (STC 15394), sigs g4r-g5r.

<sup>54</sup> *Book of Good Maners*, sig. d6r.

<sup>55</sup> *Book of Good Maners*, sigs d5v-d6r.

The *Book of Good Maners* is little concerned with the reading of the commons, since it sees it as unnecessary for them. However, other conduct books do see the benefit of the written word in providing children with spiritual instruction, though few recommend any more engagement with literature beyond the memorization of the *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria*. William Harrington's c. 1515 *Commendacions of Matrymony*, for example, suggests that:

The .vii. and laste rule is for to brynge vp theyr chyldren honestly and vertuously with due correccyon and dyscyplyne both in the lawes of god and man in the lawes of god as for to teche theym the artycles of oure fayth conteyned in oure crede. The .x. commaundementes of the lawe and what prayer they shall vse to god and his moost glorious mother / as is oure Pater noster and Aue / also frome what thynges they shall absteine / as the seuen deedly synnes with theyr braunches.<sup>56</sup>

In Harrington's advice there is, in fact, no need for the children to be able to read at all, though the written word, not least in the form of his book itself, can be a useful tool that parents may employ in their children's instruction. If we move forward to Richard Whitford's 1530 *Werke for Householdors*, we can see the author demonstrating how this process might work in a partially-literate household:

And me semeth it shuld also be a good pastyme & moche merytoryous / for you yat can rede / to gader your neyghbours aboute you on the holy day / specyally the yonge sorte / & rede to them this poore lesson. For therin ben suche thynges as they ben bounde to knowe / or can saye / that is / the Pater noster / the Aue maria / & the Crede / with suche other thynges as done folowe.<sup>57</sup>

'This maner of ye Pater noster / Aue and Crede', Whitford continues, 'I wolde haue vsed & redde vpon the boke at euery mele / or at the leest ones a daye with lowde voyce (as I sayd) that all ye persones present may here it.'<sup>58</sup>

However, by the time of the publication of Whitford's *Werke*, conduct books have begun to address a far more socially diverse audience, and have become much more preoccupied with precisely what it is that that readership is reading. By this point, they bear the imprint of the two

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<sup>56</sup> William Harrington, *In this boke are conteyned the commendacions of matrymony* (London: [John Skot for] Roberte Redman, 1528) (STC 12800), sigs d4v-e1r.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Whitford, *A werke for housholders* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1530) (STC 25422), sigs b1v-b2r.

<sup>58</sup> *A werke*, sig. c1r.

most important cultural movements in England during the first half of the sixteenth century, interlinked movements concerned not only with the matter of *which* texts ought to be read, but more significantly, with *how* those texts ought to be read: humanism and Protestantism. As Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker have noted, both humanist and Protestant reformers were occupied with attempts to construct ‘model’ readers and readerships. However, as Sharpe and Zwicker elaborate, both the humanist pedagogical project and the Protestant emphasis on individuals’ unmediated relationship with vernacular Scripture simultaneously ‘enabled readers to perform their own readings’ and ‘ultimately democratized the word.’<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Sharpe and Zwicker, *Reading*, p. 4.

## Chapter 2: Humanist Readings

In the early years of the sixteenth century, the influence of the pan-European cultural movements posthumously aggregated as ‘humanism’ wrought significant changes on English intellectual life, particularly in educational and scholarly theory and practice. With its apparent rejection of medieval materials and scholastic methods, humanism promoted a new regimen of reading which embraced the authors and literature of Greek and Latin antiquity, and provided a philological means by which they, and other texts, might be analysed. The terms ‘humanism’ and ‘humanist’ have proved notoriously imprecise as means of adequately describing a range of strains of intellectual thought which developed in different ways across countries and centuries. Nonetheless, despite some variance in ideas and practice amongst individuals and groups whose preoccupations, as J. B. Trapp reminds us, ‘were not known by the collective name of “humanism” until the nineteenth century’, a reasonably unproblematic commonality can be asserted by adopting the ‘minimal definition’ suggested by David Carlson:

Fundamentally, humanism was a committed interest in antiquity, in ancient culture, Latin or Greek, and in ancient culture more generally, committed in the sense that it was polemical, arguing in favour of a revival of ancient standards and canons of taste. Such an interest entailed, on the one hand, an effort to return *ad fontes*, in order to gain understanding of antiquity; it also entailed, on the other, an effort to put the understanding of antiquity so gained to work on and within contemporary society.

In this, as Carlson explains, humanism was not necessarily a rigid dogma demanding consistent application, but could figure as ‘something that individuals might put on and put off, by turns, in such a way that some of their work can profitably be characterized as humanist, and some cannot.’<sup>60</sup> And whilst the initial impetus of the humanist educational programme was a desire to

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<sup>60</sup> J. B. Trapp, ‘The Humanist Book’, in *The Cambridge History of the Book: Volume III, 1400-1557*, ed. by Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 285-315 (p. 286); David Carlson, *English Humanist Books: Writers and Patrons, Manuscript and Print, 1475-1525* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 5.

reconfigure the conduct of scholarship, its consequences impacted upon a far more diverse audience, one broad enough, ultimately, to include those entirely unlettered.

The origins of humanism can be traced to the work of fifteenth-century Italian scholars, who used classical texts in order to teach the *studia humanista*, and its most important and lasting impact, in England as elsewhere, remained didactic. For both the ruling elites – often personally tutored by leading humanist figures of their day – and the increasing number of literate clerical and lay bureaucrats on whom they were reliant, a properly ‘humanist’ education became essential, and, for the latter group at least, a pre-requisite to personal advancement. The adoption of a broadly humanist curriculum in English schools during the sixteenth century established the study of rhetoric, history, grammar, poetry and philosophy through classical Latin and Greek texts as the dominant pedagogical agenda, a position retained until well into the twentieth century.

Not surprisingly, humanist pedagogy has proved a central concern of Renaissance studies since its emergence as a specialist field of study. In his critique of recent scholarly treatment of the humanist programme, David Burchell reminds us that ‘nineteenth century historians made great claims for the historical significance of the Renaissance humanistic curriculum, and its rhetorical component in particular, as a means for the creation of a social type, the “spiritual individual”.’ From that type, Burchell argues, arises Jacob Burckhardt’s influential construction of Renaissance culture as ‘the crucible of a distinctive modern mode of personal identity’; an image which, he continues, ‘forms the tacit rationale for the existence of “the Renaissance” as a discrete area of multidisciplinary scholarly research today.’<sup>61</sup> Burchell’s article, as its title suggests, amounts to a defence of ‘Burckhardt’s legacy’: the centrality of humanistic education

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<sup>61</sup> David Burchell, ‘Burckhardt Redivivus: Renaissance Pedagogy as Self-Formation’, *Renaissance Studies*, 13 (1999), 283-302 (pp. 283-284).

in the creation of a recognizably contemporary sense of individualism.<sup>62</sup> Or rather, in its more *ad hominem* moments, Burchell's article might more accurately be characterized as an attack on late-twentieth century treatments of Renaissance humanist schooling, and in particular, the intense and often critical scrutiny which has been brought to bear on earlier accounts of the rise and significance of humanism.

Burchell's focus is Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine's extremely influential *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe*, a work which aimed to make 'detailed comparison between classroom practice and humanist theory' through the analysis of survivals of the humanist 'classroom' itself: textbooks, notes, students' compositions, letters and diaries.<sup>63</sup> In it, Grafton and Jardine detect a distinct disparity between the ideals of humanist education – the production, through rhetorical education, of the active *vir civilis* – and the likelihood of actual humanist educational practice fostering the development of such an individual, at least in the context of Quattrocento Italy. For Grafton and Jardine, the rote-learning and endless memorization of the humanist curriculum, even after its moral transformation at the hands of Erasmus and other 'northern humanists', represented an exercise in engineering a 'properly docile attitude towards authority', an attitude they judge to have been particularly desirable to authorities characterized by their 'closed governing elites, hereditary offices and strenuous effort to close off debate on vital political and social questions.'<sup>64</sup>

Where the arguments summarised above are engaged in debating the ability of the humanist pedagogical project to achieve its apparent aims, other recent scholarship has subjected

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<sup>62</sup> 'Burckhardt Redivivus', p. 285.

<sup>63</sup> Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London: Duckworth, 1986), p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> *From Humanism to the Humanities*, p. xiv.



the traditional representation of the trajectory of humanism's ascendancy to close analysis. Alan Stewart, for example, has argued persuasively that, in England, it was humanist writers themselves who were responsible for a construction of the progress of humanism which has lasted until the present day:

The rise of the humanists in sixteenth century England was – and is – always figured as a pitched battle between the rising humanist middling classes and a feudal aristocracy for whom the bearing of arms and the leisure pursuits of hunting and hawking were more appropriate, and, more importantly, who felt that learning was beneath them. The image, not surprisingly, can be traced to a number of early humanist writings [which] succeeded in portraying chivalry – incorrectly – as coterminous with feudalism.<sup>65</sup>

For Stewart, humanism, with its dependence on patronage, and therefore, by association, social inequality, 'was fundamentally (and problematically) conservative.'<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, Stewart suggests that humanists, rather than filling a bureaucratic gap opened by innovations in, for example, diplomacy and printing, were in fact actively engaged in the very creation of the perception of that gap.<sup>67</sup> 'The aim of humanism', Stewart suggests, 'was to establish itself as a required profession by deliberately juxtaposing itself to what it presented as a flawed dominant order, whose lacks it could supply.'<sup>68</sup>

These arguments, which in themselves only represent a fraction of an ongoing – and often heated – debate over Renaissance humanism's form and function, approach the subject from widely divergent perspectives. But the universal premise around which such debate is constructed is that of humanism's inexorable rise to ascendancy: the increasing intellectual dominance of a broadly humanist agenda over the course of the sixteenth century. And central to that agenda, as has already been noted, was an attempt to reconstitute both readers, and the act of

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<sup>65</sup> Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton and Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. xxxiv.

<sup>66</sup> *Close Readers*, p. xx.

<sup>67</sup> *Close Readers*, p. xxv.

<sup>68</sup> *Close Readers*, p. xx.

reading itself. Any attempt to trace the importance of humanist writers in changing contemporary reading habits and practices in England tends, necessarily, to be drawn to the evidence of their influence on – relatively speaking – elite audiences: the royal and aristocratic readers to whom they addressed their work, whose patronage they sought, or as whose tutors they may have served; the coterie of intellectuals with whom they debated and exchanged ideas; the grammar school pupils whose institutions began to adopt humanist, or more specifically, Erasmian curricula. However, its intended audiences notwithstanding, humanist didactic writing also came to affect, both directly and indirectly, the literate customs of the broadest possible range of readers in England during the early part of the sixteenth century. And it is that effect that I wish to examine now, through the work of the most influential humanist theorist of women's education, Juan Luis Vives, and the most influential humanist of all, Desiderius Erasmus.

### Erasmus

Histories of the impact of humanist thought in a specifically English context tend to focus upon the early years of the sixteenth century, and, inevitably, on the role played by Erasmus in promoting and perpetuating a broadly humanist political and pedagogical agenda there.<sup>69</sup> Through his own writings, and those of the coterie of humanist intellectuals he met during his visits to England and corresponded with from the continent, Erasmus came to represent, in England and elsewhere, the ideal model of the Christian humanist scholar, a representation which, Lisa Jardine argues, was meticulously crafted by Erasmus himself.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> For earlier English humanism see, for example, Roberto Weiss, *Humanism in England during the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1941), and, more recently, David Rundle, 'Humanism before the Tudors: On Nobility and the Reception of the *studia humanitatis* in Fifteenth-Century England', in *Reassessing Tudor Humanism*, ed. by Jonathan Woolfson (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 22-42.

<sup>70</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

The relevance of Erasmus to a study of non-elite reading and readerships, real or imagined, may not, of course, be immediately apparent. Whilst he did, on occasions, employ materials drawn from popular cultures and customs in his writings, those writings, no less than his exhaustive correspondence, communicated to Europe's intellectual and noble elites; only infrequently did Erasmus have much to say about the vast majority of people who fell outside these groups, and still less often did he have anything to say *to* them. However, he is an extraordinarily important figure in the history of reading, one who not only wrote in order to try to persuade people to approach texts, and in particular *the* text, the Bible, in new ways, but also provided, in his New Testament, a means by which they might do so. His entreaties may have been aimed at others amongst the European secular and religious intelligensia, but the consequences of his actions soon spread far beyond them, and beyond his control, to impact upon the relationships of all people, readers and the illiterate, nobles and commonalty alike, with their holy book. In later sections, I will address the effect of Erasmus's New Testament on this wider public, and his suggested programme by which that populace might come to a knowledge of the unmediated word of Scripture, but before doing so, I will first examine those few occasions on which Erasmus exercises himself on the subject of popular reading itself.

Erasmus's first visit to England was as tutor to William Blount, fourth Baron Mountjoy, who had been Erasmus's pupil in Paris in the late 1490s, would in turn become tutor to the young Prince Henry, and through whom Erasmus made 'connections in the highest circles.'<sup>71</sup> Amongst this circle of friends and associates were influential educators and academics like the founder of St. Paul's school, John Colet; Thomas Linacre, who served as tutor both to Henry's brother Arthur, and daughter Mary; scholars of Greek William Latimer and William Grocyn; and

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<sup>71</sup> C. Augustijn, *Erasmus: his Life, Works and Influence*, trans. by J. C. Grayson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) (originally published as *Erasmus von Rotterdam: Leben, Werk, Wirkung* (Munich: Oscar Beck, 1986)), p. 32.

most famously, Sir Thomas More. Moreover, whilst the prominence of Erasmus's contemporary fellow-travellers gave impetus to the adoption of his pedagogical and theological programme in England, its legacy was maintained, as James McConica delineates, in the teaching and writing of 'Roger Ascham, Sir John Cheke, Leonard Cox, Richard Croke, Sir Thomas Elyot, Thomas Lupset, Thomas Paynell, Thomas Ruthall, Cuthbert Tunstall, Nicholas Udall, and Christopher Urswick', all of whom, McConica argues, were 'instrumental in the promotion of the Erasmian agenda directly or indirectly.'<sup>72</sup> Fundamental to this 'Erasmian agenda', and the humanist programme more broadly, was a reconfiguration of the role and practice of reading.

'It was Erasmus', N. Scott Amos avers, 'more than any other single individual, who mediated the achievements of the Italian Renaissance to northern Europe.' And in the process of this mediation, as Amos continues, Erasmus's innovation was to bring the philological methodologies of humanism to bear on scriptural exegesis:

Whereas in Italy most of the humanists were concerned principally with secular literature, Erasmus was principally concerned with sacred literature. It was his lifework to provide for a restitution of Christendom through the application of the tools of humanism to the study of the Bible, which would in turn lead to a renewal of the 'true' or 'old' theology, and in so doing he became the leading proponent of what is now recognized as biblical humanism.<sup>73</sup>

Erasmus's 'goal', as John C. Olin succinctly summarizes, was 'to employ humanism in the service of religion, that is, to apply the new scholarship to the study and understanding of Holy Scripture and thereby restore theology and revivify religious life.' And this scholarship, as Olin explains, 'was not to be an end in itself but was to conduct men to a better life. Learning was to

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<sup>72</sup> James McConica, 'Erasmus, Desiderius (c.1467–1536)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, ed. by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 61 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), XVIII, pp. 482-9 (p. 488).

<sup>73</sup> N. Scott Amos, 'New Learning, Old Theology: Renaissance Biblical Humanism, Scripture, and the Question of Theological Method', *Renaissance Studies*, 17 (2003), 39-54 (p. 48).

lead to virtue, scholarship to God, and thus, as Erasmus saw it, the restoration of theology was to be the means toward the revival of a living and lived Christianity.’<sup>74</sup>

However, as Brian Cummings argues, ‘if Erasmus promised to reform Europe through reading, first he had to teach Europe to read according to his own principles.’<sup>75</sup> But whilst evidence of Erasmian reformist principles are plentiful in his own writings on classroom and scholarly practice, his attitude towards and ambitions for a more general class of reader are much less clearly evinced.<sup>76</sup> Modern scholarship, where it has treated this aspect of Erasmus’s influence, has frequently appeared to bear the mark of the anti-chivalric and anti-feudal model of humanism’s ascendancy earlier traced by Alan Stewart. In this reading, humanism’s rejection of an aristocratic medievalism, its recreation of the ideal Christian knight as scholar not warrior, was a project as much literary as it was political, necessitating the discarding of much of medieval secular literature, and in particular chivalric romance. In this interpretation, the humanists represented the characters and narratives of much of the previous centuries’ literature in much the same way as they represented the ‘flawed dominant order’ of the nobility – as anti-intellectual, illogical, tyrannical, vainglorious and violent.<sup>77</sup>

Famously, C. S. Lewis found no shortage of faults with the humanists in the reappraisal of their works and influences with which he introduced his 1954 *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*. The introduction’s subtitle, ‘New Learning and New Ignorance’ gives some indication of the tenor of his thesis, but it is in respect of the humanists’ attitude towards chivalric romance and scholastic philosophy that Lewis is at his most acerbic. In what he

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<sup>74</sup> John C. Olin, ‘Erasmus and Reform’, in *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus with the Life of Erasmus by Beatus Rhenanus*, ed. by John C. Olin (New York: Fordham University Press, 1975), pp. 1-21 (pp. 5-7).

<sup>75</sup> Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 111.

<sup>76</sup> For a detailed treatment of Erasmus’s educational principles, and their adoption in English grammar schools, see Eugene R. Kintgen, *Reading in Tudor England* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), pp. 18-58.

<sup>77</sup> *Close Readers*, p. xx.

describes as their rejection ('with contumely') of both, Lewis perceives humanism's 'chief negative characteristic [...] a hatred of the Middle Ages.'<sup>78</sup> More specifically, in the pedagogic writings of Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives and, later, Roger Ascham, Lewis sees a concerted attack on romances, but one which fortunately, so far as he is concerned, had not been very successful 'as far as the common reader was concerned.'<sup>79</sup> More than half a century has now passed since the publication of Lewis's book, but, as the comprehensive analysis of attitudes towards romance in both early modern and contemporary literary criticism with which Alex Davis opens his 2003 *Chivalry and Romance in the English Renaissance* demonstrates, a sense that the adoption of humanist literary principals in the sixteenth century was predicated on a concomitant rejection of previous popular literatures continues to inform much writing on early modern attitudes toward romance.<sup>80</sup>

In support of his claim, Lewis cites a well-known passage from one of Erasmus's most influential and widely reproduced treatises, the *Institutio Principis Christiani* or 'Education of a Christian Prince'. Published in 1516, the *Institutio* was dedicated to the then sixteen-year-old Prince Charles of Spain, who was to become Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, and to whom Erasmus had lately been appointed counsellor. The pedagogical programme that Erasmus presents in the *Institutio* is aimed at the cultivation of a future ruler, one whose rule will be characterised by his spiritual wisdom, and who will 'cast out those evil counsellors – ambition, anger, greed, and flattery', with the result that 'the commonwealth flourishes in every way.'<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 28-29.

<sup>79</sup> *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 29.

<sup>80</sup> Alex Davis, *Chivalry and Romance in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 1-38.

<sup>81</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, 'The Education of a Christian Prince', trans. by Neil M. Cheshire and Michael J. Heath, in *The Collected Works of Erasmus, vol. 27: Literary and Educational Writings 5*, ed. by A. H. T. Levi (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp.199-288 (p. 203).

Although ostensibly written for Charles, Erasmus suggests that the *Institutio*'s pertinence applies to a more extensive – though equally eminent – audience:

Although I knew that your Highness had no need of any man's advice, least of all mine, I had the idea of setting forth the ideal of a perfect prince for the general good, but under your name, so that those that are brought up to rule great empires may learn the principles of government through you and take from you their example.<sup>82</sup>

The model of kingship that adherence to the educational principles Erasmus lays out in the *Institutio* will inculcate is, in a sense, precisely that: a model in which the idealisation of Christian virtue and scholarly moral rectitude is personified in the prince. It is necessary that monarchs should come to represent this idealized embodiment, because, as Erasmus explains, the sovereign serves as universal exemplar, whether for good or ill:

The corruption of an evil prince spreads more quickly and widely than the contagion of any plague. Conversely, there is no other quicker and more effective way of improving public morals than for the prince to lead a blameless life. The common people imitate nothing with more pleasure than what they see their prince do. Under a gambler, gambling is rife; under a fighter, everyone gets into fights; under a gourmandizer, they wallow in extravagance; under a voluptuary, they become promiscuous; under a cruel man, they bring charges and false accusations against each other. Turn the pages of history and you will always find the morality of an age reflecting the life of its prince.

And in this reflection, Erasmus suggests, we will witness not a dribbling 'trickle-down' of moral economics, in which the lesson provided by the example of a morally upright court is gradually absorbed by the population at large, but rather the people's direct and immediate ethical remoulding after the prince's own principles. For, as Erasmus explains, 'no comet, no fateful power affects the progress of human affairs in the way that the life of the prince grips and transforms the moral attitudes and character of his subjects.'<sup>83</sup> Thus, for Erasmus, the reading that shapes the young prince's mind will no less shape the lives of those who live under his rule.

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<sup>82</sup> 'Education of a Christian Prince', p. 204.

<sup>83</sup> 'Education of a Christian Prince', p. 219.

In the case of rulers chosen by election, Erasmus argues, ‘a kingdom is best entrusted to someone who is better endowed than the rest with the qualities of a king: namely wisdom, a sense of justice, personal restraint, foresight, and concern for the public well-being.’<sup>84</sup> However, Erasmus accepts that where rulers are chosen by hereditary succession, as is almost always the case, there is no choice. In these circumstances, all hopes for beneficent and enlightened rule rest in the prince’s education:

The mind of the future prince will have to be filled straight away, from the very cradle (as they say), with healthy thoughts while it is still open and undeveloped. And from then on the seeds of morality must be sown in the virgin soil of his infant soul so that, with age and experience, they may gradually germinate and mature and, once they are set, may be rooted in him throughout his whole life. For nothing makes so deep and indelible a mark as that which is impressed in those first years.<sup>85</sup>

This malleability of the youthful intellect and moral sensibility was a theme Erasmus frequently turned to in his educational writings. But here, in the particular passage which drew Lewis’s censure, Erasmus specifically urges caution in the matter of a young prince’s reading. Contextually, Erasmus considers the sorts of advisers with whom the prince will be surrounded, and the inevitability that the guidance of many, if not all of these, will be coloured by their instinctive urge to flatter him. In this sense, books, like courtiers and politicians, form part of the body of counsellors the attraction of whose advice the prince must treat with some degree of scepticism, tempered as it may be by obsequiousness or appeals to the prince’s baser nature. Whilst there is a risk, Erasmus argues, that the reading of the exploits of, for example, Achilles, Alexander the Great, Xerxes or Julius Caesar without a (scriptural) ‘remedy’ may provoke the naturally ‘ferox ac violentus’ boy to despotism, tales of romance are dismissed out of hand, despite their apparent popularity:

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<sup>84</sup> ‘Education of a Christian Prince’, p. 206.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Education of a Christian Prince’, pp. 206-207.



But today we see a great many people enjoying the stories of Arthur and Lancelot and other legends of that sort, which are not only tyrannical but also utterly illiterate, foolish, and on the level of old wives' tales, so that it would be more advisable to put one's reading time into the comedies or the myths of the poets rather than into that sort of drivel.<sup>86</sup>

These sorts of tales are, for Erasmus, the worst possible material to which a young prince might be exposed. Their heroes are tyrants who succeed by force of arms, and their tales are *ineruditis*, (by which I suggest Erasmus means badly-, rather than un-written) which might explain why even the classics – morally questionable, perhaps, but at least well-written – would be preferable.<sup>87</sup>

The particular taste in tales with which Erasmus is here exercised is not, of course, that of Lewis's 'common reader', but rather the young king Charles of Spain who, as Lisa Jardine notes, 'because of his upbringing at the Burgundian Court [...] was probably more familiar with the romances of Arthur and Lancelot than with the Greek and Latin classics which humanist tutors were reading with their pupils in Italy and elsewhere.'<sup>88</sup> Moreover, as Robert Adams' persuasive response to Lewis argues, Erasmus's concern here is specifically with the reading of the prince as potential future ruler. His anxiety is that the prince will absorb positive representations of tyranny, and thus 'after attacking romances, [Erasmus] put forward positively a body of anti-tyrannical writers whom a prince should come to know and respect *first*.'<sup>89</sup> Although Erasmus is quick to criticize romance as, at a fundamental level, badly written, his anxiety is not that the prince's choice of literature, or that put before him, will be aped by the 'common reader', but

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<sup>86</sup> 'Education of a Christian Prince', p. 250.

<sup>87</sup> Although not, it seems, to Charles, since, as Peter Burke observes, 'Although Erasmus had warned him against this kind of reading [...] among the few books known to have interested Charles V was a romance of chivalry, *Le chevalier délibéré*, which he had translated into Spanish' (Peter Burke, *The European Renaissance: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), p. 96).

<sup>88</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, ed. by Lisa Jardine, trans. by Neil M. Cheshire and Michael J. Heath (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), p. 61, n. 102.

<sup>89</sup> Robert Adams, "'Bold Bawdry and Open Manslaughter': The English New Humanist Attack on Medieval Romance", *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 23 (1959/1960), 33-48 (p. 41).

that it will influence the prince's conduct toward a bellicose despotism, which his people will be both subject to, and imitators of.

The class and gender of the sorts of readers with whom Erasmus is concerned in the *Institutio Principis Christiani* is, then, explicit even from its title, and although Erasmus suggests that the Arthurian romance that they may choose to read is as savage, solecistic and senseless as 'old wives' tales', his concern here is not with those 'aniles fabulae' themselves, nor the readers who might be enjoying them. Elsewhere, however, Erasmus is prepared to address, at least indirectly, the reading – and listening – habits of rather less privileged or powerful audiences and, if not the merit, then at least the appeal of narratives and tales drawn from sources at once both more immediate and less 'cultured' than his Latin and Greek exemplars.

1531 saw the publication of Erasmus's *Apophthegmata*, a compilation of adages collected, in the main, from the writings of precisely those classical paragons. In his prefatory epistle, Erasmus mounts a rhetorical defence of his assemblage against anticipated accusations that some from amongst his chosen maxims might be criticized for principally provoking merriment. Erasmus maintains that such a reaction would represent no grounds for despising them, because laughter is in fact a stimulus to mental activity, because serious matters are often best dressed in humorous apparel, and because the desire for such entertainment would be better gratified by his carefully-selected dicta than by those less truthful, erudite or proper. Concluding this exculpation of the comical, Erasmus reflects upon the benefits that the use of such material can confer in the communication of secular and religious instruction.

In considering the pedagogical employment of his more amusing apophthegms, Erasmus argues that by translating them, rather than meaningless or insubstantial passages and phrases, schoolboys would gain and retain a greater mastery of the Latin tongue. Erasmus's judgment, at

least as articulated here, is that such sentences provide more substantial and fruitful material both for scholarly explication, and for novitiate engagement. Equally, that perception is no doubt informed by his conviction, expressed elsewhere and explored below, that enjoyment of the material studied provides the best foundation for educational achievement. The subjects of the focus of Erasmus's thesis here, then, are necessarily not just the literate, but those with wealth enough to afford a grammar-school education, or the personal tuition which Erasmus considered the ideal. Erasmus's concern may not be with exclusively 'noble' readers, but neither can it be legitimately expanded to include any but those from amongst, relatively speaking, the most wealthy. However, in the subsequent development of his thesis to include matters of religious direction, Erasmus touches, at least in passing, upon the experiences of an audience of far greater social and educational diversity.

Erasmus questions the perceived impropriety of blending earthly witticisms with that which is divinely inspired, considering the existing customs by which priests are given to enlivening dreary sermons:

in sacris concionibus fortasse non conuenit scripturis diuinis damiscere iocos humano, sed tamen excusatius haec adhiberentur ad excitandos dormitantes, quam aniles fabulae, quas nulli solent ex abrupto interponere prorsus è media uulgi fece haustas.<sup>90</sup>

Translating a selection from the *Apophthegmata* in 1542, Nicholas Udall, just returned to public life following the scandal that brought his dismissal as headmaster of Eton, provides a distinctly local, English gloss to the passage, and points to the custom's prevalence there as elsewhere:

In sermones percase it is not conueniente to miengle iestyng saiynge of mortall menne with the holy scriptures of God, but yet might thesame muche more excusably bee vsed, to quicken suche as at sermones been euer noddying, then olde wiues foolyshe tales of Robyn Hoode & suche others, whiche many preachers haue in

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<sup>90</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *Apophthegmatvm, Sive Scite Dictorum Libri Sex* (Lyon: Sébastien Gryphe, 1531), sigs A6r-A6v.

tymes past customably vsed to bryng in, taken out euen of the veraye botome and grossest parte of the dreggues of the commen peoples foolyshe talkyng.<sup>91</sup>

Clearly, the practice holds little interest for Erasmus; the only intent in his invocation of these ‘aniles fabulae’ is to highlight the absurdity of their acceptability when more cultivated writings are considered inadmissible. However, although dismissive and disdainfully delivered, Erasmus’s observation offers an arresting glimpse of an exchange between ‘popular’ and more learned cultures. Priests season their homilies with material the source of which, for Erasmus at least, is explicitly the *vulgus*, and that material is presented not as a sop to please the palates of the plebeian part of the congregation, but rather to excite the congregation as a whole. The cross-class cultural transaction that this priestly appropriation represents demonstrates the unique position of the church service as the location for a range of physical and intellectual interactions between overlapping and interrelated classes, cultures and capacities. In them, the spectrum of society experiences ceremonies that are both textual and oral, both Latinate and vernacular and where, it seems, spiritual exhortation is spiced with secular stories.

The emphasis on the educational efficacy of rhetorical *copia* which characterizes Erasmus’s preamble to his *Apophthegmata* reiterates a foundation of his didactic method. He had made the same point more expansively in another widely influential pedagogical text, *De Pueris Statim ac Liberaliter Instituendis Declamatio*, which, as Erasmus writes in its dedicatory letter, he had composed ‘During my stay in Italy, when I drafted my work *De copia verborum ac rerum*.’<sup>92</sup> (This would date it to between 1506 and 1509, although it did not appear in print until 1529). In it, Erasmus argues that in instructing a young person, a teacher must be careful to

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<sup>91</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *Apophthegmes that is to saie, prompte, quicke, wittie and sentencious saiynge*s, trans. by Nicholas Udall (London: Richard Grafton, 1542) (STC 10443), sig. \*\*\*1v.

<sup>92</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, ‘A Declamation on the Subject of Early Liberal Education for Children’ (‘De Pueris Statim ac Liberaliter Instituendis Declamatio’), trans. by Beert C. Verstraete, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 26: *Literary and Educational Writings 4*, ed. by J. K. Sowards (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 291-346 (p. 295)

choose as his subject-matter ‘only what [the student] finds agreeable, relevant, and attractive material, which flowers, so to speak, with promise.’ Since youth is characterized by ‘gaiety and charm’, Erasmus argues, ‘dullness and harshness ought to be entirely banished from all study.’<sup>93</sup> Erasmus outlines a general method of study taking account of these criteria, and in doing so offers a fascinating aside on his own youthful engagement with popular tales:

There is nothing which prevents usefulness from going hand in hand with pleasure, and integrity with enjoyment. When these qualities are combined, children acquire a whole range of beneficial learning without experiencing any boredom. What is there to hinder them from learning delightful tales, witty aphorisms, memorable incidents from history, or intelligent fables with no greater effort than that with which they pick up and absorb stupid, often vulgar ballads, ridiculous old wives’ tales, and all sorts of tedious womanish gossip?

For Erasmus, then, it seems that schoolboys have particular tastes: if they are provided with material no less entertaining, though of more positive educative value, then they will absorb their lessons effortlessly. Moreover, Erasmus confesses, his own young mind had been no less prone to the effortless absorption of fantasies and trifles, folklore that has remained with him into adulthood:

Think of all the rubbish we can still remember now as grown men – dreams, inane riddles, silly nursery rhymes about phantoms, spectres, ghosts, screech-owls, vampires, bogeymen, fairies and demons; all those unedifying falsehoods taken from popular story-books and all those crazy tales and fantasies of a risqué sort – all those things we learned as children, sitting with our grandfathers or grandmothers, or with nurses and girls at their spinning, while they caressed us and played with us.

‘Imagine the progress we would have made towards acquiring knowledge’, Erasmus continues, ‘if we had absorbed at once the material I have just been suggesting instead of all this rubbish, which is more foolish than Sicilian trifles, as the saying goes, and not only frivolous but also harmful.’<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Erasmus, ‘De pueris’, pp. 337-338.

<sup>94</sup> Erasmus, ‘A Declamation’, p. 338.

This material Erasmus does not specifically identify as popular: despite the implications of Verstraete's translation, these are scurrilous, rather than churlish songs (*'cantonem ineptam, plerumque et scurrilem'*), vile (*'nequiter'*) rather than vulgar fantasies.<sup>95</sup> And, as in his *Institutio*, Erasmus is ostensibly addressing no 'common' reader, but one from amongst the nobility: William, Duke of Cleves, the younger brother of Anne. But in his reminiscence, Erasmus highlights a porousness in apparently solid class-cultural divisions: in their relationships with, elderly relatives, nursemaids and household servants, even aristocratic children, it seems, could find themselves immersed in a popular culture both literate and oral. Erasmus's representation of this scene is no doubt indebted, to some degree at least, to classical models. Plato's *Republic* famously speaks of the importance of carefully approving stories for young minds, 'when they are easily moulded and when any impression we choose to make leaves a permanent mark':

our first business is to supervise the production of stories, and choose only those we think suitable, and reject the rest. We shall persuade mothers and nurses to tell our chosen stories to their children, and by means of them to mould their minds and characters which are more important than their bodies.<sup>96</sup>

Moreover, Alex Scobie has examined numerous references to *aniles fabula* in Greek and Roman literature, including several examples which speak of 'gruesome stories [...] told to frighten children into obedience', and other instances describing 'informal storytelling [which] took place while women were working at their spindles and looms.'<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, whatever the degree of inspiration that those models may have provided for Erasmus, they also appear to have struck a chord with his own experience, one which he expected his audience to recognise and share.

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<sup>95</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, 'De Pveris Statim ac Liberaliter Institvendis', ed. by Jean-Claude Margolin, in *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, Ordinis I, Tomus 2 (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1971), pp. 1-78 (p. 69).

<sup>96</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by Desmond Lee, 2<sup>nd</sup> (rev.) edn (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 131.

<sup>97</sup> Alex Scobie, 'Storytellers, Storytelling, and the Novel in Graeco-Roman Antiquity', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, 122 (1979), 229-59 (pp. 249-52).

It is tempting to interpret Erasmus's recollection of this immersion as providing early evidence for a theory of cross-class transmission of 'folk narratives' frequently articulated in scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is the method of propagation upon which the cultural historian Robert Darnton hypothesized in the exploration of fairy tales in early modern France which opened his highly influential 1983 book, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. In his attempt to access 'the mental world of the unenlightened during the Enlightenment', Darnton argues that Charles Perrault's 1697 collection of 'fairy tales', *Histoires, ou Contes du Temps Passé*, is representative of 'something unique in the history of French literature: the supreme point of contact between the seemingly separate worlds of elite and popular culture.'<sup>98</sup> Darnton speculates on the source of Perrault's material, and theorizes a mode of dissemination for it seemingly analogous to that of Erasmus's infant experience:

How the contact took place cannot be determined, but it may have occurred in a scene like the one in the frontispiece to the original edition of [Perrault's] tales, the first printed version of Mother Goose, which shows three well-dressed children listening raptly to an old crone at work in what seems to be the servants' quarters [...] Perrault himself probably heard them in a similar setting, and so did most persons of his class; for all gentle folk passed their early childhood with wet nurses and nannies, who lulled them to sleep with popular songs and amused them [...] with *histoires ou contes du temps passé* [...] that is, old wives' tales [...] servants and wet nurses provided the link between the culture of the people and the culture of the elite.<sup>99</sup>

This manner of engagement with the 'culture of the people' was, then, in Darnton's thus far plausible hypothesis, a normal – indeed, universal – feature of the infancy of the upper-classes in seventeenth-century France, and Erasmus's markedly similar account appears evidential of an identical process of absorption occurring in Rotterdam almost two centuries earlier. In this, Darnton's contention appears relatively unproblematic: entrusting children to the care of servants

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<sup>98</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Viking, 1984), p. 9; Charles Perrault, *Histoires, ou Contes du Temps Passé, avec des Moralitez* (Paris: C. Barbin, 1697).

<sup>99</sup> *Great Cat*, pp. 62-63.

and nursemaids was, after all, commonplace in wealthy and ‘middling’ households until comparatively recent times, and it seems likely that such attendants would entertain or pacify their charges with their own familiar songs and stories. Indeed, the cultural critic and prominent fairy tale theorist Jack Zipes, although elsewhere critical of much in Darnton’s approach,<sup>100</sup> proposes precisely the same mechanism of transmission in his 1983 *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. ‘In the seventeenth century’, Zipes asserts, ‘children of all classes listened to these [folk] tales. The peasants did not exclude children when stories were told around the hearth, and lower-class wet-nurses and governesses related the same tales to children of the upper classes.’<sup>101</sup>

However, in Darnton’s consideration of the specific cultural material thus transferred, his supposition is more problematic. Darnton suggests that the adult Perrault’s *Histoires* were in fact expurgated versions of the folk-tales he had learned as a child, that he ‘picked up stories from the oral tradition and adapted them to the salon.’<sup>102</sup> Darnton’s postulation is, however, dependent upon a theory which, although impossible to substantiate evidentially, was once routinely accepted in research into both fairy tales specifically, and popular literature more generally. It is a reading of popular culture which proposes that a folk-tradition representing a pre-modern, perhaps even pre-Christian ‘peasant world-view’ survived into modernity in the oral culture of the illiterate lower-classes in which it was preserved. During early modern Europe’s apparently linear transition from orality to literacy, the theory held, folk tales were transmitted from one plebeian generation to the next relatively unchanged. Eventually, such tales ‘infect’ a more

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<sup>100</sup> See, for example, ‘An Exchange on Mother Goose’, *New York Review of Books*, 10 May 1984, p. 47, which features letters from both Zipes and the psychoanalyst Irving B. Harrison, responding to Darnton’s ‘The Meaning of Mother Goose’, a digested version of the first chapter of *The Great Cat Massacre*, which had appeared in the same publication three months earlier (*New York Review of Books*, 2 February 1984, pp. 41-47). Zipe’s criticizes Darnton’s article both for its conjecture, and for its contention that ‘peasant-raconteurs’ had imbued the fairy tales of their countries with discernable, nation-specific cultural differences.

<sup>101</sup> Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (London: Heinemann, 1983), pp. 8-9.

<sup>102</sup> *Great Cat*, p. 62.



rarefied print culture, first through early pamphlets and jest-book collections, then later in the bowdlerized versions produced by writers such as Perrault or Jacob and Willhelm Grimm, or in the collections of enthusiastic antiquaries like, for example, Joseph Ritson.

Whilst much in the scholarship of the last thirty or so years has served to displace dichotomous descriptions of the shift from oral to literate,<sup>103</sup> recently, and perhaps more pertinently, Ruth Bottigheimer has convincingly argued that Darnton's thesis represents the tail-end of a 'pervasive conviction that fairy tales were generated by the folk.' This construction, Bottigheimer suggests, owes its existence to the imaginations of nineteenth-century scholars, who constructed a mythical history in which figures not dissimilar to Darnton's 'peasant-raconteurs' exchanged fireside fairy tales formulated by their nameless ancestors. The need to provide for fantastic stories this fantastic provenance was felt, Bottigheimer posits, because 'the existence of a national peasantry with a national repertoire of stories was required by nineteenth-century nation builders', and this proactive patriotism required that these stories 'confirmed national identity by differing meaningfully from those of the nation next door.'<sup>104</sup> This, then, is much the same nationalistic impetus that Peter Burke identified motivating the scholarly 'discovery of the people' of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>105</sup> But for Bottigheimer it results not only in a surge of intellectual interest in folk and popular cultures, but also in the appropriation of essentially literary, textually-transmitted narratives into a spurious folk tradition.

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<sup>103</sup> See, for example, *Oral and Literate Culture; The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500-1850*, ed. by Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300-1700*, ed. by Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>104</sup> Ruth Bottigheimer, 'Fairy Tales, Old Wives and Printing Presses', *History Today*, 54 (2004), 38-44 (p. 42).

<sup>105</sup> *Popular Culture*, pp. 3-22.

Nevertheless, whilst Bottigheimer's argument may offer a useful insight into alternative models for the modes of transmission of particular fairy and other folk tales into the modern era, it appears less likely that this is the process which Erasmus remembers. Certainly, as will be addressed below, Erasmus does seem to include tales mediated through text amongst the cornucopia of stories and songs to which he was exposed during his childhood, but he also speaks of the impression made by dreams, riddles and rhymes, and tales told at the knee; Erasmus recollects his own youthful engagement with a range of fantastic characters and imaginary realms, some of which he may have encountered in written (although not necessarily printed) form, but many others of which, learned from grandparents or servants, or even the products of his own nocturnal imagination, do seem to fit the model which Bottigheimer challenges.

For Bottigheimer, bibliographic technologies developed since the initial publication of Darnton's work in 1984 have necessitated a radical reassessment of the originary sources of much of what was once considered 'folk literature'. In particular, she identifies the advent of widespread electronic cataloguing in European libraries as having had 'a profound impact on the understanding of cheap print and popular reading', not least because of the sheer volume of previously uncatalogued printed popular material that that process has brought to light. And the documentation of such texts which took place in the late 1980s and the 1990s, Bottigheimer argues, 'provided strong evidence that routes of tale dissemination had been based not on word of mouth, but on the printed page.'<sup>106</sup> Clearly, Erasmus's anecdotal remembrance of his childhood predilections does nothing to render the hard evidence of recently rediscovered broadsheets and chapbooks any the less convincing. But there is a risk here that I misrepresent

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<sup>106</sup> 'Fairy Tales, Old Wives, and Printing Presses', p. 41. See also, Ruth Bottigheimer, 'Fairy-Tale Origins, Fairy-Tale Dissemination, and Folk Narrative Theory', *Fabula: Zeitschrift für Erzählforschung*, 47 (2006), 211-221.

Bottigheimer's argument. She is, after all, discussing specific tales, identifiable narratives 'rediscovered' by later writers and collectors; Erasmus appears rather to be drawing upon his recollection of a whole range of childhood encounters with the fantastic, a mélange of invented characters and creatures, their sources as varied as their subjects.

Nevertheless, Erasmus's assertions might be specifically cited in support of a critique of theories of folk narrative transmission which Bottigheimer makes elsewhere, in an exploration of the French print history of Giovan Francesco Straparola's *Piacevoli Notti*.<sup>107</sup> In it, Bottigheimer draws attention to a passage in John Locke's pedagogical treatise *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* frequently advanced as exemplifying the servant-child model of fairy tale dissemination. The section to which Bottigheimer alludes is one in which Locke stresses the vulnerability of young minds to the fearful and nightmarish tales which household staff commonly use to check their behaviour. Locke cautions that the effects of such stories will be retained into the adulthood of the child upon whom they are impressed, and who should therefore be protected from them:

always whilst he is young, be sure to preserve his tender mind from all impressions and notions of *Sprites* and *Goblins*, or any fearful apprehensions in the dark. This he will be in danger of from the indiscretion of servants, whose usual method it is to awe children and keep them in subjection by telling them of *Raw-Head* and *Bloody-Bones* and such other names as carry with them the ideas of something terrible and hurtful which they have reason to be afraid of when alone, especially in the dark. This must be carefully prevented, for though by this foolosh way they may keep them from little faults, yet the remedy is much worse than the disease, and there is stamped upon their imaginations ideas that follow them in terror and affrightment. Such bug-bear thoughts once get into the tender minds of children, and being set on with a strong impression, from the dread that accompanies such apprehensions sink deep, and fasten themselves so as not easily, if ever, to be got out again; and whilst they are there, frequently haunt them with strange visions, making children dastards when alone, and afraid of their shadows and darkness all their lives after.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ruth Bottigheimer, 'France's First Fairy Tales: The Restoration and Rise Narratives of *Les facetieuses nuictz du Seigneur François Straparole*', *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*, 19 (2005), 17-31.

<sup>108</sup> John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. by Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing, 1996), pp. 103-4.

Bottigheimer laments what she identifies as a persistent misreading of Locke's sentiments. The tales which are the subject of Locke's concern are not long-established 'folk-narratives', but simple bogey-stories, invoked either to induce obedience, or, as Bottigheimer argues, to explain quotidian irritations, 'such as lost keys or dry cows.' Nonetheless, Bottigheimer asserts, 'generations of scholars have imposed a different meaning on the tales Locke discussed and have assumed that they were not tales about the fairy (and goblin and brownie and leprechaun) world but rather were fairy tales in the modern sense.'<sup>109</sup> The nature of the shadowy phantasms that Bottigheimer alerts us to in Locke is, in this reading, directly consonant with the subjects of those 'inane riddles' and 'silly nursery rhymes' Erasmus remembers from his youth. Perhaps the 'phantoms, spectres, ghosts, screech-owls, vampires, bogeymen, fairies and demons' of Erasmus's childhood were conjured more to delight than to discipline, but in all other respects these are homologous with Locke's hobgoblins and homunculi. Erasmus is here confessing an early immersion in a form of 'folk culture' – indeed, claiming it as a universal childhood experience – but one which for the most part consists of little more than 'nursery talk'.

However, Bottigheimer's concern is with the means of transmission of specific fairy tales, in a specific location.<sup>110</sup> Her analysis seeks to demonstrate a literate and literary source for the dissemination of Straparola's stories to upper-class audiences, in which they arrive not from storytelling peasant nursemaids relating oral folk narratives to their wealthy charges, but from 'literate women' amongst the household: mothers, grandmothers and aunts, who 'might have told fairy tales as bedtime stories, particularly if they had read such stories in Straparola's

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<sup>109</sup> 'France's First Fairy Tales', p. 20.

<sup>110</sup> Bottigheimer's definition of what constitutes a fairy tale is also very specific, perhaps even limited; in her reading, a fairy tale is either 'a brief narrative in which a prince or princess is expelled from his or her royal station, suffers tasks and trials, and is finally restored to their rightful royal place by magic', or 'an even briefer narrative in which a poor boy or girl rises with magical assistance to a royal marriage and consequent wealth' ('France's First Fairy Tales', p. 17).

collection.’<sup>111</sup> But whilst Bottigheimer sees a clear distinction between ‘fairy tales with plotted texts and Aristotelian beginnings, middles, ends’ and the stories of bugbears and bogeymen which servants might teach to children, this should not obscure the significant influence that Locke – and Erasmus – ascribe to such folktales. Locke may describe these tales, rooted in popular tradition, principally in terms of the threat that they represent to vulnerable young minds, but that threat is one which provides evidence of the enduring impression that he believes they can make. For Locke, children should be protected from these named and nameless terrors by their complete avoidance, but Erasmus, though dismissive of their intrinsic value, nonetheless sees in the manner of their absorption something worth emulating. Erasmus may condemn folktales and bugbears as ‘rubbish’, but he recognizes the fact that they are *enjoyable* rubbish, and it is the pleasure that they produce in those who have heard them, himself included, that accounts for their easy retention into adulthood. Children should, therefore, be presented with material which has both usefulness (*utilitas*) and integrity (*honestas*), but which is no less exciting and agreeable, since then they will be able to commit it to memory with as little effort.

At first reading at least, Erasmus does not confine this model to the stories of oral tradition alone; no less persistent are those ‘unedifying falsehoods taken from popular story-books and all those crazy tales and fantasies of a risqué sort’ which Erasmus suggests are retained into adulthood. Clearly Erasmus is remembering narratives of some description, even if, frustratingly, he offers no identifying description of those narratives. Moreover, that some amongst these tales were drawn from ‘popular story-books’ appears to demonstrate a textual source for their transmission to elite audiences, precisely the method Bottigheimer proposes for fairy tales. Disappointingly, Erasmus’s text does not, in this respect, offer the unequivocal evidence of Beert C. Verstraete’s translation, for what Verstraete renders as ‘popular story-

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<sup>111</sup> ‘France’s First Fairy Tales’, p. 20.

books' is, in Erasmus's original, simply 'vulgaribus historiis'.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, although they are not necessarily drawn from books, they are, explicitly, the stories of the common people. What those stories were is, of course, unrecoverable, but Erasmus does appear to be making a clear differentiation between fantastic *characters* – the bugbears that Richard Sherry would later anglicise as 'spirites, hobgoblins, fayries, witches, nightmares, wood men and gyauntes'<sup>113</sup> – and these fantastic *tales*. In doing so, Erasmus's anamnesis gives at least an impression of the complex circulation of stories in his childhood household, an impression of an experience which Erasmus presumes his readers have shared, and with which translators like Udall and Sherry later believed English audiences would identify. Stories represent a form of currency in the exchanges between the child Erasmus and the rest of his household, and this trading of tales is engaged in by the whole range of household members, from (presumably) literate grandparents, to (presumably) illiterate maids.

Erasmian references to 'popular' stories and reading are, then, rare, and those that do occur tend, like those examined above, to be brief, dismissive, tangential asides or comparatives to the real subjects of his interest. Despite the popularity of his works in terms of reprints and vernacular translations, Erasmus writes for a specific audience which, if not confined solely to the aristocracy, can at least be characterized as an educated, male, elite. There is, though, evidence that some amongst his contemporary readers saw in his different compositions the deliberate effort to write distinct works for diverse readerships. The French scholar Gentian Hervet, for example, prefaces his English translation of Erasmus's *De Misericordia Domini* ('On the Mercy of God') with a passage of fulsome praise for its author. In it, Hervet suggests that

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<sup>112</sup> Desiderius Erasmus *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* (Ordinis I, Tomus 2), ed. by Jean-Claude Margolin and Pierre Mesnard (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1971), p. 69.

<sup>113</sup> Richard Sherry, *A Treatise of Schemes & Tropes... Whervnto is added a declamacion... by the most excellent and famous Clearke, Erasmus of Roterodame* (London: John Day, 1550) (STC 22428), sig. D1r.

each of Erasmus's compositions aimed to deliver the same message, but tailored to specific classes of readers:

All the warkes yat he made were profitable but specially to one kynde of men / his Prouerbes / his Newe Testament / and many other treatises onely to lerned men / of the boke of ye Instruction of princis the most profit redoundeth to princis. This boke onle with the boke called ye knyfe or wepon of a Christen sowdiour hath so far spredde abrode his frutefull branches yat there is no man but great frute gether he may out of it / excepte he that thynketh that it maketh no matter whether he be damned or saued.<sup>114</sup>

However, whilst readings like Hervet's demonstrate that Erasmus's works are, to some extent, and perhaps unintentionally, open to more universal interpretations than their patrons and addressees might imply, in one of his most famous and influential passages, Erasmus directly tackles – if not the reading habits of humble folk – then the matter of their engagement with the one text common to all estates: the Bible. But before turning to Erasmus's *Paraclesis*, first I wish to examine a text directly influenced by both Erasmus's writing, and in particular the *Institutio Principis Christiani*, and by Erasmus's personal encouragement; a book which, in part, stipulates literature appropriate to a range of readers far more socially – if not sexually – diverse than those dealt with by Erasmus; a book which blends tropes familiar from the literature of conduct into a gender-specific humanist pedagogical programme, the strictures of which Hilda L. Smith argues, 'more than any other, established the parameters of women's learning in the first half of the sixteenth century': Juan Luis Vives's *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*, which, in its hugely influential English translation, became *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *De Immensa Misericordia. A Sermon of the Excedyng Mercy of God*, trans. by Gentian Hervet (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1526?) (STC 10474), sig. A3r.

<sup>115</sup> Hilda L. Smith, 'Humanist Education and the Renaissance Concept of Woman', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700*, ed. by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.9-29 (p.16).

## Vives

In 1523, shortly before taking up Cardinal Wolsey's appointment as his reader in humanity at Oxford, the Spanish humanist scholar Juan Luis Vives composed *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*. Written as a sort of counterpart to the *Institutio* of his friend Erasmus, the work was suggested by William Blount, and addressed to Katherine of Aragon, with whom, as Charles Fantazzi notes, Vives 'exercised great influence at court in his role of friend and spiritual counselor.'<sup>116</sup> The *De Institutione*'s tripartite structure consists of separate books, each of which deals with one of the three 'ages' – or perhaps more accurately, marital circumstances – of a woman's life: maidenhood, marriage and widowhood, and the education, behaviour and conduct Vives deems appropriate to each. Further, as Fantazzi summarizes, despite its title, the *De Institutione* 'also addresses the social status of women in general, the church's doctrine on the sacrament of matrimony, and the moral instruction of womankind.'<sup>117</sup> Thus whilst the *De Institutione* speaks at some length on, for example, the matter of women's learning, offering in this respect a seemingly enlightened attitude towards women's inherent scholarly abilities and the desirability of universal female education, the framework within which it does so is one in which women's lives are entirely defined by their client status in relation to men and patriarchal institutions. In this, a woman's character is defined not by her attainments or erudition, but solely by her chastity, exhortations to the preservation of which dominate all sections of the text.

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<sup>116</sup> Charles Fantazzi, 'Prelude to the Other Voice in Vives', in Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, ed. and trans. by Charles Fantazzi (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 1-42 (p.8).

<sup>117</sup> 'Prelude to the Other Voice', p. 13.



In the year following its composition, the *De Institutione* was published in its Latin original in Antwerp,<sup>118</sup> and vernacular translations in Castilian, English, French, German, Italian and Dutch had appeared by the middle of the century.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, one of the recent editors of Richard Hyrde's c.1529 English translation has calculated that 'by 1600 the work had appeared in more than forty editions.'<sup>120</sup> However, it was in England that Vives's treatise enjoyed its greatest popularity and longevity. There, its translation by Hyrde, a member of Sir Thomas More's circle and resident of his Chelsea home, to which Vives himself had been a not-infrequent visitor, survives in nine separate editions published over the course of the sixteenth century.<sup>121</sup> That popularity, Nancy Weitz Miller suggests, is in part a consequence of the fact that, despite the royal audience that its dedication asserts, *De Institutione* 'attempts to formulate a general and broadly applicable regimen for rearing and educating women.'<sup>122</sup> Although Vives's Latin original continued to be reproduced and re-translated throughout Europe during the period, and was substantially revised by Vives himself in 1538, my main concern here is with Hyrde's translation.<sup>123</sup> This was the version encountered by the majority of Vives's English readers, and the version in which the *De Institutione* achieved its extraordinary popularity in Tudor England. Moreover, the fact of its vernacular translation and printing argues, as Constance Jordan

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<sup>118</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* (Antwerp: Michael Hillen, 1524).

<sup>119</sup> 'Prelude to the Other Voice in Vives', pp. 30-32. Fantazzi notes that Vives expressed dissatisfaction with the work's title, which he saw as foisted upon it by self-interested publishers (p.13).

<sup>120</sup> Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, 'The Life of Juan Luis Vives', in Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, trans. by Richard Hyrde, ed. by Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, Elizabeth H. Hageman and Margaret Mikesell (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. xv-xxxviii (p. xv).

<sup>121</sup> STC 24856 (c. 1529); STC 24856.5 (c. 1529); STC 24857 (c. 1531); STC 24858 (1541); STC 24859 (1547); STC 24860 (1557); STC 24861 (c. 1567); STC 24862 (1585); STC 24863 (1592).

<sup>122</sup> Nancy Weitz Miller, 'Metaphor and the Mystification of Chastity in Vives's *Instruction of a Christian Woman*', in *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1999), pp. 132-145 (p. 133).

<sup>123</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* (Basel: Robert Winter, 1538).

suggests, that, however specific a noble audience to whom Vives may have intended it, it was also ‘perceived as appropriate for a larger and more socially heterogeneous audience.’<sup>124</sup>

That Vives’s text ended up reaching an audience rather more diverse than its dedication might imply was not a consequence unintended by its author, and nor is its subsequent successful publishing history the sole source of evidence that its lessons were adjudged applicable to women beyond the noblest of households. Within the text itself there are, as I will argue, several indications that Vives’s intention was to address the education of women from a rather more diverse range of backgrounds, and whilst it would be difficult to argue that Vives’s focus is not primarily upon the upper-classes, he nonetheless represents his arguments as being of pertinence to an audience more varied even than that. However, although I will argue that *De Institutione* is aimed at a rather broader constituency than might be assumed, it is not my point here to suggest that the consideration of the education of the most humble classes of women was uppermost in Vives’s mind during its conception. Rather, my assertion is that Vives, despite the apparent liberalism of his attitude towards the value of women’s education, nonetheless retains and promotes a construction of women which is essentially conservative. The moral qualities that he ascribes to women, the weaknesses to which they are prey and the desires to which they are beholden, are those of long-established misogynist tradition: lustfulness, vanity, indolence and garrulity which combine to make women uniquely morally vulnerable. These characteristics, in Vives as in so many writers from antiquity to the present day, are represented as universal feminine traits, and thus in addressing them, and their correctives, Vives believes that he addresses the subject of womankind as a whole.

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<sup>124</sup> Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 12.

It is as an antidote to these appetites and infirmities that Vives proscribes his educational programme for women and girls, and a key ingredient in that remedy may be delivered, Vives asserts, through a carefully structured curriculum of reading, in which close control over which texts and authors are made available to women should be exercised by the men who must, as Vives makes plain, maintain governance over them. In doing so, Kate Aughterson maintains, Vives ‘bases both his educational philosophy and curriculum on the texts of the Christian Fathers, such as Jerome’s letters to Eustochium and Furia, Tertullian’s *De cultu feminarum* or St Cyprian’s *De habitu virginum*.’ Those writers, as Aughterson continues, ‘advocate education in the virtues of modesty and obedience, with reading as a subsidiary private pleasure, in contradistinction to the humanist programme of classical and pagan reading and learning recommended for boys.’<sup>125</sup> However, Vives’s attitude towards women’s reading is far more prescriptive than Aughterson’s argument might suggest, and it is so because of the agency he ascribes to their reading materials. In Vives’s syllabus, the right reading can arm women in the protection of the one thing of value that they have to maintain: their chastity; the wrong reading will only enflame their unchaste tendencies, and lead, inevitably, to their moral failure. Thus, as we shall see, Vives delineates a canonical list of writers and texts which should be made available to women, and an antithetical catalogue of those which should not, a catalogue dominated by popular European romances, and to which Richard Hyrde’s translation appends a number of specifically English versions of books of chivalric romance.

That the English translation of a work which purports to celebrate the value of female erudition should have been made by Richard Hyrde might appear singularly appropriate. Whilst serving as either tutor, or perhaps physician to Sir Thomas More’s household, Hyrde had, in

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<sup>125</sup> *Renaissance Woman: Constructions of Femininity in England*, ed. by Kate Aughterson (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 166.

1524, provided the dedicatory preface to a translation of Erasmus's *Precatio dominica in septem portiones distributa* by More's eldest daughter, Margaret, published, in 1525, as *A deuout treatise vpon the Pater noster*.<sup>126</sup> In it, Hyrde, like Vives, offers a defence of women's intellectual capabilities. He champions their right to learn Greek and Latin against those 'many men' who claim that 'many thinges / that be written in the latin and greke tong' will:

bothe enflame their stomakes a great deale the more / to that vice / that men saye they be to moche gyuen vnto of their owne nature alredy / and enstructe them also with more subtilyte and conueyaunce / to sette forward and accomplysse their frowarde entente and purpose.<sup>127</sup>

In part, Hyrde justifies female erudition by gainsaying the gendered construction of women's moral irresolution, their 'pleasure of a contensyous mynde'. If men could engage in the unbiased and fair-minded assessment of feminine characteristics, he argues, if they could 'loke theron with one euyn eye / and consydre the matter equally', then they would have to conclude 'that women be nat onely of no lesse constancy and discrecion than men / but also more stedfast and sure to truste vnto / than they.'<sup>128</sup> Simultaneously, Hyrde argues that women's very domesticity, and indeed their apparent intellectual capriciousness may in fact mean that scholarliness in them is less perilous than it is in men, and that whilst engaged with literature, a woman avoids the risk that she strays towards any less desirable thoughts:

Nowe as for lernyng / if it were cause of any yuell as they say it is / it were worse in the man than in the woman / bicause (as I haue said here before) he can bothe worse staye and refrayne hym selfe / than she. And moreouer than that / he cometh ofter and in mo occasyons thane the woman / in as moche / as he lyueth more forthe abroad amonge company dayly / where he shalbe moued to vtter suche crafte as he hath gotten by his lernynge. And women abyde moost at home / occupied euer with some good or necessary busynesse [...] Also / redyng and studyeng of booke so occupieth the mynde / that it can haue no leyser to muse or delyte in other fantasies / whan in all handy werkes / that men saye be more mete for a woman / the body may

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<sup>126</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *A deuoute treatise vpon the Pater noster*, trans. by Margaret Roper (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1525) (STC 10477).

<sup>127</sup> *deuoute treatise*, sig. A2r.

<sup>128</sup> *deuoute treatise*, sig. A2v.

be busy in one place / and the mynde walkyng in another: & while they syt sowing & spinnyng with their fyngers / maye caste and compasse many peuysshe fantasyes in their myndes / whiche must nedes be occupied / outhur with good or badde / so long as they be wakyng.<sup>129</sup>

In this, then, Hyrde views reading as of particular benefit in occupying women's minds. In addressing the fifteenth century Italian humanists' attitude towards female scholarship, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine suggest that:

the accomplishment of the educated woman (the 'learned lady') is an end in itself, like fine needlepoint or the ability to perform ably on lute or virginals. It is not viewed as training for anything, perhaps not even for virtue (except insofar as all these activities keep their idle hands and minds busy).<sup>130</sup>

But for Hyrde, reading is more than this, for it occupies the wandering female mind in a way which physical activities are unable to do.

Of course, the notion that reading, and indeed work might prove useful means of keeping women from thinking upon that which they should not, and in particular from the unchaste, had been a recurrent and abiding idea in writing directed towards the proscription of acceptable female conduct. Caesarius, bishop of Arles in the early sixth century, for example, wrote in what was the first monastic rule aimed specifically at nuns that 'they should always devote themselves to reading for two hours, that is, from daybreak until the second hour. For the rest of the day let them do their work, and not occupy themselves in conversation.'<sup>131</sup> The instruction was not, moreover, confined to women religious: the French theologian and chancellor of the University of Paris from 1395 Jean Gerson wrote, as did Vives, of the tripartite division of womanhood in the social classification of virgin, wife and widow, the model which Jerome and other patristic

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<sup>129</sup> *deuoute treatise*, sigs A3r-A4r.

<sup>130</sup> *From Humanism to the Humanities*, p. 56.

<sup>131</sup> *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Emilie Amt (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 224.

sources bequeathed to much medieval writing and thought on secular women and their roles.<sup>132</sup>

Writing of the proper occupation of a virgin, Gerson argued that she should above all else avoid idleness, and that that might be avoided by work, prayer, spiritual contemplation and obeisance, and reading.<sup>133</sup>

Combined with this focus on the utility of reading in preventing a woman's mind from wandering is Hyrde's suggestion that learning is less problematic in a woman than in a man because she will internalize it. Where men are bound to express the fruits of their learning in their daily encounters beyond the household, women, Hyrde asserts, 'abyde moost at home'. This, for Hyrde, and for Vives, is a key difference in the effect that reading has on the different sexes. For men, that which they learn by reading is something that they use, something that they may employ to affect their negotiations with the outside world; for women, reading is notable for the effect that it has on them, on their internal worlds. Male reading may help men to shape their public place, but female reading shapes the most private of places, their own mental world. For all Hyrde's seemingly positive attitude towards women reading and learning, he conceives of it as not only serving a completely different purpose than it does in men, but functioning in a completely different way, and this distinction is one which is only amplified by Vives.

In his preface to his translation of the *De Institutione*, which, like its subject, is dedicated 'Unto the moste excellent prynces quene Catharine',<sup>134</sup> Hyrde, who died shortly before its appearance in print, outlines both the inspiration for and process by which his edition came to be produced. Of Vives's original, Hyrde states:

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<sup>132</sup> Ruth Evans, 'Virginites', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. by Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 21-39, (p. 25).

<sup>133</sup> Jean Gerson, 'De La Chasteté', in *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. by Monseigneur Glorieux, 10 vols (Paris: Desclée, 1960-73), VII, pp. 851-6 (p. 855).

<sup>134</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *A very frutefull and pleasant boke called the Instruction of a Christen woman*, trans. by Richarde Hyrde (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1529?) (STC 24856), sig. A2r; Vives, *Instruction of a Christen Woman*, ed. by Beauchamp *et al*, p. 5. Subsequent quotations are from this modern edition.

And surely for the plantynge and nurysshynge of good vertuous in euery kynde of women / virgins / wyues / and wydowes / I verily beleue there was neuer any treatis made / either furnisshed with more goodly counsayles / or sette out with more effectuall reasons / or garnysshed with more substanciall authoritees or stored more plentuously of conuenient examples / nor all these thynges more goodly treated and handeled / than maister Uiues hath done in his book.

On reading it, Hyrde continues, 'I wished in my mynde that eyther in euery countre women were lerned in the latin tonge / or the boke out of latin translated in to euery tonge.'<sup>135</sup> The former circumstance, Hyrde explains, does not exist, because of the 'vnreasonable ouer sight of men / whiche neuer cease to complayne of womens conditions'; although men have 'the education and order of [women] in theyr owne handes' they 'do litell diligence to teache them and bryng them vp better', and even 'purposely with drawe them fro lernynge'. With this in mind, Hyrde explains, 'I thought at the least wyse for my parte hit wolde do well to translate this boke into our englysshe tonge / for the commodite and profite of our owne countre.'<sup>136</sup>

Having completed his work in secret, Hyrde explains, he submitted his translation to his 'syngular good mayster and brynger vppe Syr Thomas More / to whose iugement and correction', he continues, 'I vse to submyt what so euer I do or go about / that I set any store by.' More, it seems, had intended to assay a translation himself, 'his manyfolde busynes nat withstandyng', and thus 'easedde of the translatynge', Hyrde prevailed upon him 'to take the labour to rede [Hyrde's translation] ouer / and correcte hit. Whiche he ryght gladlye dyd.' Thus reassured, Hyrde reveals, he felt himself 'encoraged to put forth vnto your most noble grace this translation: to whose maiestie sith the originall worke was dedicate'.<sup>137</sup>

The *Instruction of a Christen Woman* is indeed addressed to Vives's friend and patron Katherine. As Vives explains to her in its dedicatory epistle, he had been 'moued partly by the

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<sup>135</sup> *Instruction*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>136</sup> *Instruction*, p. 6.

<sup>137</sup> *Instruction*, p. 6.

holynes and goodnes of your lyuyng / partly by the fauour and loue that your grace beareth towarde holy study & lernyng / to write some thyng vnto your good grace / of thinformacion and bryngyngvp of a Christen woman.’<sup>138</sup> But whilst the *Instruction* is dedicated to Katherine, Vives makes it clear that she has no need to draw lessons from it herself: ‘you haue ben both mayde / wyfe / and wydowe / and wyfe agayne’, he states, ‘and so you haue handled your selfe in all thordre and course of your lyfe: that what so euer you dyd myght be an example vnto others to lyue after.’ Katherine has already occupied the three possible states of womanhood, and thus the *Instruction* can serve no pedagogic purpose in her case. Rather, Vives offers Katherine the book ‘in lyke maner / as if a peynter wolde brynge vnto you your owne visage and image / most counnyly peynted. For lyke as in that purtrature you myght se your bodily similitude: so in these bokes shall you se the resemblaunce of your mynde and goodnes.’<sup>139</sup> Thus Vives constructs Katherine as the model of virtuous femininity that the dutiful observer of his injunctions might become. The Katherine of Vives’s dedication is the exemplar, the *Instruction* is precisely that: the guide to achieving her model, and in this Vives provides one of his first indications that he aims his book at an audience beyond Katherine’s household.

Vives does appear to offer at least one way in which Katherine might find his work of practical use, suggesting to her that ‘your derest doughter Mary shall rede these instructions of myne / and followe in lyuyng.’<sup>140</sup> Yet any sense that Vives wrote the text solely, as Robert Adams has argued, ‘as part of the plan of education for the Princess Mary’ is immediately undermined in the dedication, and further brought into question by many of the subjects touched upon in the book itself.<sup>141</sup> Although Vives recommends the book to Mary, the fact that she will

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<sup>138</sup> *Instruction*, p. 8.

<sup>139</sup> *Instruction*, p. 11.

<sup>140</sup> *Instruction*, p. 11.

<sup>141</sup> ‘Bold Bawdry’, p. 43.



achieve virtuous womanhood is already guaranteed, just as long as ‘she orde her selfe after thexample that she hath at home with her of your vertue and wysedome.’ Unlike other readers of the *Instruction*, who have only the Katherine of its dedication upon which to model themselves, Mary has the real thing. In fact, it is inevitable that Mary ‘muste nedes be both very good and holy’, since she, ‘is commen of you and noble kyng Henry the viii. suche a couple of mates: that your honour and vertue passe al craftes of preysyng.’<sup>142</sup>

That Vives intends the lessons of the *Instruction* to be applicable to a wider audience than Mary alone might be suggested by comparing its content with that of a programme of study specifically for Katherine’s daughter, the composition of which he was engaged with at the same time. In the same year that he wrote the *De Institutione*, and at Katherine’s behest, Vives wrote *De Ratione Studii Puerilis* (‘On a Plan of Study for Children’), which begins with a straightforward explanation of its provenance, and the manner in which it is to be employed:

JOHANNES LUDOVICUS VIVES.  
*To the LADY CATHERINE, his unique protectress.*

You have ordered me to write a brief plan of study according to which thy daughter Mary may be educated by her tutor. Gladly have I obeyed thee, as I would in far greater matters, were I able. And since thou hast chosen as her teacher, a man above all learned and honest, as was fit, I was content to point out details as with a finger. He will explain the rest of the matters.<sup>143</sup>

The *De Ratione Studii* proposes that Mary follow a Latinate curriculum, focusing on the character-building effect of reading carefully-chosen authors, both for style and subject, and the mastery of the language in both written and spoken forms. The writers Mary should study are, Charles Fantazzi notes ‘much more oriented to government than those recommended in the *De Institutione*’, and thus may well reflect the possibility, as Fantazzi suggests, that ‘Vives was

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<sup>142</sup> *Instruction*, p. 11.

<sup>143</sup> Juan Luis Vives, ‘Plan of Study for Girls’, in *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women*, ed. and trans. by Foster Watson (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), pp. 137-149 (p. 137).

perhaps tacitly aware that Mary, sole heir to the throne, might someday be destined to rule.’<sup>144</sup>

The *De Ratione* is not solely concerned with political readings, since Vives also suggests instructional material from the Christian Fathers, arguing that the authors that he proposes are also, ‘those who, at the same time, cultivate right language and right living’:

Cicero, Seneca, the works of Plutarch [...] some dialogues of Plato – especially those which concern the government of the state. Then the epistles of Jerome, and some works of Ambrosius and Augustine should be read. Further, the *Institutiones Principis*, the *Enchiridion*, the *Paraphrases* [of Erasmus], and many of the works useful to piety, and the *Utopia* of Thomas More. With no great trouble she can learn history from Justinus, Florus, and Valerius Maximus. With all these, both when she gets up in the morning and goes to bed at night, let her read each day something from the New Testament [...] There are also Christian poets, whom it will be pleasant and fruitful to read, such as Prudentius, Sidonius, Paulinus, Aratus, Prosper, Juvenecus [...] Nor are the heathen poets to be entirely omitted – particularly Lucan, Seneca the Tragedian, and a good part of Horace.<sup>145</sup>

This unadorned and purposeful tone of practical instruction which characterizes the *De Ratione Studii*, with its manifold and circumscribed tuitive objective, contrasts sharply with the more expansive reach of the *Instruction*.

In part, of course, this might be explained not as demonstrating Vives’s desire to reach a wider audience with the *Instruction*, but rather as a consequence of its wider remit: *De Ratione* provides a specific programme of learning for the child Mary to follow, whilst the *Instruction* broadens its focus to address not just a woman’s education, but her conduct through all aspects and ages of her life. But, given the range of circumstances and conditions upon which Vives feels it necessary to comment in the *Instruction*, many of which it is hard, not to say impossible to envisage befalling a member of a royal household, let alone a royal themselves, his intended audience must be broad enough to include women from a wide range of social backgrounds. Moreover, in concluding the *Instruction*’s dedication, Vives revisits his earlier representation of

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<sup>144</sup> Vives, *Education*, p. 13.

<sup>145</sup> ‘Plan of Study for Girls’, p. 147.

Katherine as exemplar, and, in making the breadth of his intended readership explicit, boldly co-opts her into the book's pedagogical project:

Therefore al other women shal haue an example of your lyfe and dedes: and by these bokes that I haue dedicated vnto your name / theys shal haue rules and preceptes to lyue by: and so shall they be bounden vnto your goodnes / both for that / whiche hit selfe hath done in gyuyng example: and that hit hath ben thoccasion of my writyng.<sup>146</sup>

It is this sense that Vives sees the examples provided by both Katherine and his book as applicable to a rather wider audience than might be initially supposed that begins to emerge through the main body of the work itself.

Vives begins by confessing that although 'I doubt nat but some wyl thynke my preceptes ouersore and sharpe', nonetheless they 'ought to be suche / that euery body may soone can them / and bear easily in mynde.'<sup>147</sup> Here, then, Vives appears to be directly addressing a universal female readership – or at least, universal in so far as an audience of literate women could be represented as such – but although, as we shall see, Vives discusses the education and behaviour of women from a fairly broad range of social and intellectual backgrounds, only occasionally does he address them directly. Far more frequently, the moral and practical directions he gives are aimed squarely at those with the power to impose them upon women: principally, their fathers and husbands. The fourth chapter of the first book, 'Of the lernyng of maydes' opens with the straightforward proposal that learning in a woman is to be encouraged whatever her intellectual ability:

Of maydes some be but lyttell mete for lernyng: Lyke wyse as some men be vn apte / agayne some be euen borne vnto hit / or at lest nat vnfete for hit. Therefore they that be dulle are nat to be discouraged / and those that be apte / shulde be harted & encoraged.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *Instruction*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>147</sup> *Instruction*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>148</sup> *Instruction*, p. 19.

Vives continues by arguing that learning is, in this respect, to be encouraged not for the intrinsic value of scholarly or scriptural self-improvement, as it might be in men, but rather as a form of sexual self-defence. Women should glean moral examples from appropriate literatures to rally in resistance against their own propensity to viciousness: ‘she that hath lerned in bokes...and hath furnyshe & fensed her mynde wyth holy counsailes’, Vives contends, ‘shal neuer fynde to do any vilany’; or at the very least, he maintains that that ‘vilany’ will be mitigated: ‘for if she can fynde in her harte to do naughtyly / hauyng so many preceptes of vertue to kepe her / what shulde we suppose she shulde do / hauynge no knowledge of goodness at al?’ Vives proceeds with a conventional roll-call of female examples ‘of all goodnes & chastite’, drawn from ‘tholde worlde’, where, he argues, ‘we shall fynde no lerned woman that euer was yll.’<sup>149</sup>

Turning to his present day, Vives cites the example of ‘the foure daughters of quene Isabell’ – of whom Katherine of Aragon was, of course, one – ‘wel lerned al’, before appearing to broaden the social range of women under consideration and ‘to speke of more meane folkes.’ The erudite women Vives goes on to describe are, however, hardly unexceptional, and are only ‘meane folkes’ in comparison to the learned princesses he has just considered: ‘I wolde reken amonge this sorte the daughters of .S. T. M. kn. M. E. and C. and with them theyr kyns woman .M. G whom theyr father nat content only to haue them good and very chast / wolde also they shulde be wel lerned: supposyng that by that meane they shulde be more truely and surely chaste. Wherin neyther that great wyse man is disceyued / nor none other that are of the same opinion.’<sup>150</sup> Vives is, of course, alluding to Sir Thomas More’s daughters, Margaret, Elizabeth, Cecily and More’s adopted daughter Margaret Giggs, and presenting these famously erudite women as exemplars of a learned yet chaste femininity. In this, Vives no doubt draws upon

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<sup>149</sup> *Instruction*, p. 20.

<sup>150</sup> *Instruction*, p. 22.

personal knowledge, gleaned during the frequent visits he made to the More household during the final year of the *De Institutione*'s composition. This is not, however, according to Pamela Benson, a neutral representation of the educative environment in More's household. For More, Benson suggests, 'the goal of education for both sexes was spiritual rather than political; this meant that his learned daughters and wards appeared to conform to woman's traditional private role.'<sup>151</sup> Vives's description, Benson argues, is 'a startling example of Vives's rewriting of More [...] For More, learning opens up the spiritual world to women; for Vives, learning is a means of more securely ("surely") achieving the socially useful end of preserving a woman's chastity.'<sup>152</sup>

Two years earlier, Erasmus had confessed to having been no less inspired by the example of More's family, and especially that of its young women. Writing to the French scholar Guillaume Budé in 1521, Erasmus speaks warmly of the pains More takes 'to give his whole household an education in good literature, setting thereby a new precedent which', he believes, 'will soon be widely followed, so happy is the outcome.' Amongst 'this charming group', Erasmus continues, 'you never see one of these girls idle, or busied with the trifles that women enjoy', for rather 'they have a Livy in their hands.'<sup>153</sup> For Erasmus, the important (and remarkable) point about More's household is that its women are never idle ('*ociosam*'), but nor do they occupy themselves with those frivolities which are, he suggests, a woman's usual wont ('*nullam ineptiis muliebribus occupatam*').<sup>154</sup>

Erasmus does not specify whether these '*ineptiis*' are necessarily frivolous texts, but that is surely the implication given the proximity of his approving recognition of the copies of Livy

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<sup>151</sup> Pamela Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1992), p. 157.

<sup>152</sup> *Invention of the Renaissance Woman*, p. 172.

<sup>153</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 8: *The Correspondence of Erasmus, Letters 1122 to 1251, 1520 to 1521*, trans. by R. A. B. Mynors, annot. by Peter G. Bietenholz (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 296.

<sup>154</sup> *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. by P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen and H. W. Garrod, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906-58), IV, p. 577.

with which More's daughters and charge are otherwise busied. As Erasmus continues, admitting that it is through More's example that he has been obliged to reassess his opinion of the usefulness of education to women, we see the significance of the women of More's household being occupied in reading, but also of that being the right sort of reading. As with Vives, the purpose and efficacy of women's reading is measured largely in terms of its relationship to continence:

scarcely any mortal man was not under the conviction that, for the female sex, education had nothing to offer in the way of either virtue or reputation. Nor was I myself in the old days completely free of this opinion; but More has put it quite out of my head. For two things in particular are perilous to a girl's virtue, idleness and improper amusements, and against both of these the love of literature is a protection [...] nothing so occupies a girl's whole heart as the love of reading. And besides this advantage, that the mind is kept from pernicious idleness, this is the way to absorb the highest principles, which can both instruct and inspire the mind in the pursuit of virtue.<sup>155</sup>

Again, as with Hyrde's earlier promotion of women's reading, there is nothing new in Erasmus's observation that reading provides a useful means of avoiding otiosity in both men and women. As Christopher Cannon notes, the sixth-century *Rule of Saint Benedict* argues that 'idleness is the enemy of the soul; the brethren, therefore, must be occupied at stated hours [...] in sacred reading.'<sup>156</sup> But Erasmus sees in women, and particularly girls, a love of reading itself, one that can be made use of so long as its subject is 'literature', rather than anything 'improper.' Besides serving as a bulwark in the protection of her chastity, the chief utility of education for women is to prepare them for the one acceptable role that will afford them any responsibility, to prepare them for the business of managing their future marital home. In this, Erasmus suggests, 'a

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<sup>155</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 8, p. 297.

<sup>156</sup> Christopher Cannon, 'Monastic Productions', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 316-48 (pp. 318-9). See also Christopher de Hamel, 'Books and Society', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume 2, 1100-1400*, ed. by Nigel Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 3-21 (p. 6).

woman must have intelligence if she is to keep her household up to its duties, to form and mould her children's characters, and meet her husband's needs in every way.<sup>157</sup>

Vives's argument follows a markedly similar trajectory to that presented by Erasmus. From the specific inspiration presented by personal knowledge of More and his household, Vives moves to a more general discussion of the virtues of women's education as a guarantor of their sexual morality:

the studie of lernyng is suche a thyng / yat it occupieth ones mynde holly / and lyfteth it vp vnto the knowlege of moste goodly matters: and plucketh it from the remembraunce of suche thynges as be foule. And if any suche thought come into theyr mynde / eyther the mynde / well fortified with the preceptes of good lyuyng / auoydeth them away / orels hit gyueth none hede vnto those thynges / that be vyle and foule: whan it hath other moost goodly and pure pleasure / where with hit is deltyed.<sup>158</sup>

Vives's relentless exhortations to female chastity and focus on the consequences of female promiscuity not only colour those passages principally concerned with the practicalities of women's education, but are, in a sense, the overriding concerns of the *Instruction* as a whole. That they should be so Vives contends in a succinct delineation of the fundamental differences between men and women, viewed from a startlingly partisan perspective. A man, Vives contends, 'nedeth many thynges / as wysedome / eloquence / knowledge of thynges / with remembraunce / some crafte to lyue bye / Justice / Leberalite / lustye stomake / and other thynges moo / that were to longe to reherce' and because of this inherently complex masculinity, 'though some of these do lacke / hit is nat to be disliked / so that many of them be had.' By contrast, Vives continues:

in a woman no man wyll loke for eloquence / great witte / or prudence / or craft to lyue by / or ordryng of the commen weale / or iustice / or liberalite: finally no man will loke for any other thing of a woman / but her honestye: the whiche onely / if hit

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<sup>157</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 8, p. 298.

<sup>158</sup> *Instruction*, p. 22.

be lacked / is lyke in a man / if he lacke all yat he shulde haue. For in a woman the honestie is in stede of all.<sup>159</sup>

A woman's character, then, is wholly defined by male scrutiny, and since the masculine gaze is indifferent to all but a woman's 'honestie', that is the sole and all-encompassing arbiter of her individuality. A woman has no need of the rhetorical education so important to humanist programmes for the education of boys and men since, as Patricia Parker argues:

the public nature of rhetoric – taking women outside their proper “province” or place – which disqualified them, in a long tradition dating from as ancient authority as Aristotle's strictures that women were to be not only silent but identified with the property of the home and with the private sphere, with a private rather than a common place.<sup>160</sup>

In this, then, the emphasis upon public eloquence as a discrete male sphere in writers such as Vives and Erasmus serves, as Kate Aughterson notes, to 'intensify the developing split between men's public function and place and women's private function and space.'<sup>161</sup>

For Vives, the condition of a woman's chastity is not merely the most important, but the *only* means of determining her character, and it is exclusively through the evaluation of men that that character has any meaningful existence. A woman's chastity is most at risk when she strays outside the, ideally vigorously enforced, confines of her home: if she 'goth forth amonge people', then 'she cometh forth in iugement and extreme perell of her beautie / honeste / demurenes / witte / shamfastnes / and vertue.'<sup>162</sup> This is, for Vives, a concern so important that he devotes separate chapters to the dangers of 'going abroad' for each of a woman's three possible matrimonial conditions. For the unmarried woman, although accepting that 'forthe she must nedes go some tymes', nonetheless Vives wishes that 'hit shulde be as selde as may be'; for married women, 'hit is becommynge [...] to go lesse abroad than maydes / bicause they haue that

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<sup>159</sup> *Instruction*, p. 35.

<sup>160</sup> Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 104.

<sup>161</sup> *Renaissance Woman*, p. 165.

<sup>162</sup> *Instruction*, p. 57.



whiche the maydes shulde seme to seke' (that is, husbands); for a widow 'the surest is nat to go moche abrode: and whan she goth / to be companied with some good and sad woman.'<sup>163</sup>

Vives does accept that it may at times be necessary for women to relinquish the 'security' of home, and in acknowledging the circumstances that may compel a woman to do so, Vives makes it explicit that the potential readership to whom the *Instruction*'s lessons apply is by no means confined to the affluent:

Nat withstandyng ther be some that must nedes be a brode / for theyr lyuyng / as those that by & sell: Whiche / if it were possible / I wolde nat that women shulde be put to those businesses: and if it muste nedes be so / let olde women do them / or maryed women that be paste myddle age. But if yonge women must nedes do this / let them be curteise without flatteryng wordes / and shamfast without presumcion / and rather take losse in theyr marchaundise / than in theyr honesty.<sup>164</sup>

In this, then, Vives accepts that financial necessity may drive a woman beyond the confines of home, and in doing so he demonstrates some of the social diversity of the women he envisages reading, or perhaps hearing, the *Instruction*'s lessons. Thus whilst Hilda L. Smith is surely correct to characterize the text as 'a limited and even a contradictory vision of the proper education for women,' her explanation that it is so in part because 'it was directed towards aristocratic ladies and not to a wide range of English families' suggests an audience far more geographically and socially specific than that which Vives intends.<sup>165</sup> Vives is, after all, not speaking of the woman forced to stray beyond the home in order to obtain the goods which supply its domestic economy, but of those who must earn a living. Moreover, Vives's 'contradictory vision' is informed by his belief that women are obliged to occupy a contradictory position in society, and whilst he does nothing to challenge the imposition of that role, nor even

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<sup>163</sup> *Instruction*, pp. 57-65, 128-34, 173-5.

<sup>164</sup> *Instruction*, p. 131.

<sup>165</sup> 'Humanist Education', p. 16.

to question whether it is right, he does at least acknowledge that women are, to some extent, placed in an impossible position:

If thou talke lyttell in company / folkes thynke thou canste but lytell good: if thou speke moche / they reken the lyght: if thou speke uncounnyngly, they counte the dull wytted: if thou speke counnyngly / thou shalte be called a shrewe: if thou answere nat quickly / thou shalt be called proude / or yll brought up: if thou answere / they shall say thou wylt be sone ouer comen: if thou syt with demure countenance / thou arte called a dissembler: if thou make moche mouynge / they wyll call the folishe: if thou loke on any syde / than wyll they say / thy mynde is there: if thou laugh whan any man laugheth / though thou do hit nat a purpose / streyght they wyll say thou hast a fantasie unto the man and his sayeng / and that hit were no great maistry to wynne the.<sup>166</sup>

A woman's only course, then, is to avoid any public role, and thus, as Catherine Eskin argues, 'Vives warns women that verbal and public power is ultimately a trap. Participation in public discourse would call woman's chastity into question.'<sup>167</sup>

That Vives is able to conceive of his message as a relatively universal one, applying equally to women of contrasting backgrounds is, to some extent, a function of his reductive conception of femininity. It is not just that women's lives are entirely circumscribed by the demands of conspicuous continence, but that they, maid, wife, or widow, are wholly defined by the external perception of their sexual condition. As Vives make clear in the *Instruction's* dedicatory epistle, 'a woman hath no charge to se to / but her honestie and chastyte. Wherefore whan she is enfurmed of that / she is sufficiently appoynted.'<sup>168</sup> Vives's construction of femininity inherits the all-encompassing *querelle des femmes* notion of womanhood representing a single, monolithic entity in which a woman's particular social circumstances are, then, of little

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<sup>166</sup> *Instruction*, p. 58.

<sup>167</sup> Catherine R. Eskin, 'The Rei(g)ning of Women's Tongues in English Books of Instruction and Rhetorics', in *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800*, ed. by Barbara J. Whitehead (New York: Garland, 1999), pp. 101-32 (p. 117).

<sup>168</sup> *Instruction*, p. 9.

significance; the same threat applies equally to the reputations of all women, and all women exist only in their reputations.

Economic demands notwithstanding, the surest means to the preservation of a woman's reputation lie in her domestic confinement. Vives's ideal, then, is one in which a woman 'if she be good / hit were better to be at home within / and unknown to other folkes. And in company to holde her tonge demurely. And let fewe se her / and none at al here her.'<sup>169</sup> And it is this injunction that she should not stray abroad, accompanied as it is, as Lena Cowen Orlin has noted, by a version of the no less familiar command that women should be 'chaste, silent and obedient,' which informs that section of the *Instruction* in which Vives deals unambiguously with women reading.<sup>170</sup> In this, Vives again draws upon a long-standing tradition of patristic and later church writing concerning women's roles and behaviour, but his instructions are particularly heavily indebted to one amongst the Fathers, Jerome, and specifically his celebrated letter to Eustochium, *De custodia virginitatis*, written on the occasion of her vow of perpetual virginity (c. 384).

In his letter, Jerome entreats its recipient to adopt the behavioural codes that Vives seeks to apply to women in general. Jerome writes, he says, not in praise of virginity, but rather with the intention of keeping it safe, since:

To know what is good is not enough; when you have chosen it you must guard it with jealous care [...] Therefore before God and Jesus Christ and His chosen angels I adjure you to guard what you have, and not lightly to expose to the public gaze the vessels of the Lord's temple which priests alone are allowed to see.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> *Instruction*, p. 23.

<sup>170</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Three Ways to be Invisible in the Renaissance: Sex, Reputation, and Stitchery', in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. by Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1999), pp. 183-203 (p. 184).

<sup>171</sup> *Select Letters of St Jerome*, trans. by F. A. Wright (London: Heinemann, 1933), p. 103.

Eustochium's surest means of protecting that virginity is to remain indoors, indeed, within her chamber, where her only visitor should be her 'Bridegroom': Christ. Should she step outside, she risks the fate of Dinah, who 'went out and was seduced,'<sup>172</sup> and was frequently held up as the example of what might befall the woman who left the sanctuary of home. 'Let foolish virgins roam abroad', Jerome continues, 'do you for your part stay within with the Bridegroom.'<sup>173</sup> This assertion that women who leave the sanctity of home are blameworthy for the risks that they are taking with their chastity had, by Vives's time of writing, become almost a hackneyed commonplace of writing about both secular and religious women. Eileen Power's comprehensive and still extremely useful work on medieval English conventual life highlights the ecclesiastical establishment's efforts to restrict the movements of nuns, who, according to the Bull *Periculoso* of 1299 which was, Power notes, 'the first general regulation on the subject which was binding as a law upon the whole church':

having slackened the reins of decency and having shamelessly cast aside the modesty of their order and of their sex, sometimes gad about outside their monasteries in the dwellings of secular persons [...] to the grave offence of Him to Whom they have, of their own will, vowed their innocence, to the opprobrium of religion and to the scandal of very many persons.

The Bull presented the most straightforward of solutions: claustration; all nuns, present and future, and of any order, 'shall henceforth remain perpetually enclosed within their monasteries.' The Bull's success, as Power wryly notes, can be measured by the repeated efforts to enforce its terms over the proceeding three centuries: 'the constant repetition of the order that nuns should not leave their convents is the measure of its failure.'<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> *Select Letters*, p. 109.

<sup>173</sup> *Select Letters*, p. 113.

<sup>174</sup> Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 344-5.

Moreover, as G. R. Owst observed, similar attempts to restrict secular women's movements are evident in medieval sermons, again, as with Jerome, citing biblical precedent. Thus a medieval preacher might suggest that widows 'schulde kepe hem in pryve as moche as thei myghte [...] and noght busye hem to moche aboute the world.' Rather, she should follow the example of Judith:

that was a faire womman and a clene wedowe, and sche held hir priveliche in clos in hir hous with hir women and wolde noght goon out, but schoned sight of men and los of the world.

Maids might be similarly admonished, as Owst's examples continue with Dinah once more invoked:

as Dyna, Jacobes doughter, that walkede out of her ynne to se women of the contre that sche wonede ynne, and was yvased and enforced and lost here maydenhode. Nyce maydenhode is glyckened to Jeptes doughter, that walkede aboute in the monteynes twey monthes for to wepe her maydenhode. So doth nyce maydenes that walketh aboute in medes and in fayre places ledynge daunces and syngynge, as it were schewynge hem self to lese her maydenhode [...] ffor it byfalleth to maydenes to be in stilnesse and in cloos, as oure lady seynte Marie was whenne the angel comme to hure and fonde hure in a pryvy chambre and nought stondynge ne walkynge by stretys.<sup>175</sup>

However, Jerome is no less concerned with Eustochium's reading. She should, he asserts, 'Read often and learn all you can', and, 'let sleep steal upon you with a book in your hand and let the sacred page catch your drooping head.'<sup>176</sup> But she should also exercise caution in what she reads. In words which Alcuin was to echo, Jerome asks:

What communion hath light with darkness? What concord hath Christ with Belial? What has Horace to do with the Psalter, Virgil with the Gospels and Cicero with Paul? Is not a brother made to stumble if he sees you sitting at table in an idol's temple?

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<sup>175</sup> G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters & of the English People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), p. 119.

<sup>176</sup> *Select Letters*, p. 87.

Before confessing his own ‘unhappy experience.’ Jerome had, he confesses, been unable to abandon his own library of pagan works, and thus he would fast ‘only to read Cicero afterwards’, would shed tears for his previous sins, ‘and then [...] would take up Plautus again’, with the result that when he returned to reading the prophets, ‘their language seemed harsh and barbarous.’<sup>177</sup> However, during a bout of fever, Jerome received divine judgement upon his choice of reading matter:

Suddenly I was caught up in the spirit and dragged before the Judge's judgment seat: and here the light was so dazzling, and the brightness shining from those who stood around so radiant, that I flung myself upon the ground and did not dare to look up. I was asked to state my condition and replied that I was a Christian. But He who presided said: ‘Thou liest; thou art a Ciceronian, not a Christian. For where thy treasure is there will thy heart be also’ [...] At last the bystanders fell at the knees of Him who presided, and prayed Him to pardon my youth and give me opportunity to repent of my error, on the understanding that the extreme of torture should be inflicted on me if ever I read again the works of Gentile authors. In the stress of that dread hour I should have been willing to make even larger promises, and taking oath I called upon His name: ‘O Lord, if ever again I possess worldly books or read them, I have denied thee.’<sup>178</sup>

From that moment on, perhaps unsurprisingly, Jerome abandoned pagan writers, and henceforth, ‘read the books of God with a greater zeal than I had ever given before to the books of men.’<sup>179</sup> This, then, is the model of reading that Jerome wishes Eustochium to follow, and it is one which, informs Vives’s suggested reading list. But it is not one which Vives is able to follow to the letter. Unlike Jerome, he is not quite able to abandon the classical authors altogether, nor even to suggest that, in all cases, that is the appropriate path for a woman to follow.

Vives directly addresses women’s reading in a chapter which forms part of the book concerned with unmarried young women, like Eustochium, virgins, which is entitled, straightforwardly enough, ‘What books to be redde / and what nat.’ Vives begins with a criticism

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<sup>177</sup> *Select Letters*, p. 125.

<sup>178</sup> *Select Letters*, pp. 127-9.

<sup>179</sup> *Select Letters*, p. 129.

of contemporary vernacular reading habits applicable to both sexes: ‘There is an vse nowe a dayes worse than amonge the pagans’, he despairingly notes, ‘that bokes written in our mothers tonges / that be made but for idel men & women to rede / haue none other matter / but of warre and loue.’ Vives deplores idleness in both men and women, since it is, as we have seen, the ideal condition in which unchaste thoughts might develop, but where Erasmus rejects what he sees as tales of rapine and vainglory lest they be imitated by their powerful male readers, Vives perceives them as, of course, an endangerment to female readers’ chastity. ‘What shulde a mayde do with armoure?’ Vives asks ‘Whiche ones to name were a shame for her [...] Hit can nat lyghtly be a chaste mynde / that is occupied with thynkyng on armour / and turney / and mannes valiaunce.’

In this reading, women’s consumption of chivalric tales represents their ‘going abroad’ in their imaginations, and is, therefore, analogous to a custom, of which Vives, incredulous, has, ‘herde tell’, and which he offers in direct comparison:

that in some places gentyl women behold marueilous busily the playes and iustynge  
of armed men / and gyue sentence and iudgement of them: and that the men feare and  
set more by theyr iugementes than the mennes.

Vives’s stupefaction is doubtless somewhat disingenuous, since he can hardly have been surprised to discover that women played a significant role in the courtly structure of tournaments, nor of their popularity as symbolic representations of Tudor magnificence. Indeed, in this might be discerned a direct rebuke to Katherine herself, in whose honour the spectacular Westminster Tournament of 1511 had celebrated the birth of her first son.<sup>180</sup> Moreover, in making women’s reading of fictional feats of arms analogous with their witnessing of actual jousts, Vives may be conflating real and imagined in much the same way that the producers of

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<sup>180</sup> Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 234.

tournaments, at least in the early years of Henry's reign, sought to do. Then, as Michael Graves notes, although tournaments were genuine contests of martial prowess, 'they were also interwoven with the romanticism and allegorical traditions of the Burgundian Court. So combat took place within the context of lengthy romantic and heroic speeches, disguisings, elaborate pageant cars and scenic devices.'<sup>181</sup> In this 'world-turned-upside-down' scenario of Vives's construction, where the objects of judgement have turned judges themselves, female morality is, unsurprisingly, soon 'infected', for 'a woman that vseth those feates drynketh poyson in her herte.' Here, since the poisoning is moral rather than physical, Vives sees little distinction between women's external and internal lives: whilst he 'can nat tell whether it be mete for a Christen man to handle armur' he is certain that it should not 'be leful for a woman to loke upon them / ye though she handle them nat / yet to be conversant amonge them with herte and mynde / whiche is worse.'<sup>182</sup>

If tales of war lead inexorably to unchaste thoughts, then what of the woman who actively chooses romance, who 'redest [of] other mennes loue and glosyng wordes / and by lytell and lytel drynkest the entycementes of that poyson', perhaps in some cases unknowingly, but more often 'many tymes ware and wittingly'? Such women, Vives contends, in whom there is often 'no good mynde all redy', only read such books 'to kepe them self in the thoughtes of loue.' For these readers, Vives proposes a solution more drastic even than the biblical justification he cites:<sup>183</sup>

It were better for them to haue no lernynge at all / but also to lese theyr eies / that they shulde nat rede: and theyr eares / that they shulde nat heare. For as our lorde sayth in the gossell: it were better for them to go blynde and deffe in to lyfe / than with .ii. eies to be caste in to helle.

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<sup>181</sup> Michael A. Graves, *Henry VIII* (London and New York: Longman, 2003), pp. 60-1.

<sup>182</sup> *Instruction*, p. 24.

<sup>183</sup> Matt. 18:9.



A woman who reads these tales is, somewhat incongruously, ‘so vile vnto Christen folkes / that she is abominable vnto pagans’, but responsibility for her condition lies not with the romance-reader herself, but with her spiritual, domestic and cultural governors. Thus Vives wonders at the ‘holy preachers’ who ‘make great a do about many small matters’, but ‘crye nat out on this in euery sermone’; at the fathers and husbands who allow such reading, and, ultimately, ‘that the maners & customes of people wyll dissemble and ouer loke / that women shal vse to rede wantonnes.’<sup>184</sup>

Vives’s construction of the circumstances of romance reading here bears closer analysis. As we have seen, ‘great a do’ *had* been being made about the sinfulness of secular reading and its pleasures since antiquity, with medieval romance in particular singled out as a spiritually-dangerous waste of time to both men and women. But if Vives’s criticism of preachers’ failure to address their congregations’ reading habits appears somewhat inaccurate, his suggestion that it is the people’s ‘maners & customes’ to ignore such admonitions is perhaps rather closer to the mark. Although, as Carol Meale notes, ‘the problems inherent in discussing the audiences for romance are complex’, few would deny its popularity amongst medieval and later audiences in England.<sup>185</sup> Indeed, Meale suggests that a growth in the popularity of romance during the fifteenth century, attested to by the exponentially increased number of manuscript romances surviving from that century in comparison with the thirteenth and fourteenth, reflects the expansion of a reading public from outside the nobility:

developments in technology meant that books became cheaper to produce, which in turn encouraged a growth in reading for pleasure amongst those who had previously had little opportunity to employ their literate skills in areas other than those related to business.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> *Instruction*, p. 25.

<sup>185</sup> Carol M. Meale, “‘Gode men / Wiues maydnes and alle men’: Romance and its Audiences, in *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 209-25 (p. 209).

<sup>186</sup> “‘Gode men’”, p. 217.

Whether women, despite the moralists' injunctions, were particularly prone to succumb to the pleasures of romance is less clear. Nevertheless, though evidence tends to be fragmentary, that which is available, as Meale's research shows, suggests that after devotional works, women in late medieval England were more likely to own works of romance than of any other genre.<sup>187</sup> If Vives's incredulous disapproval of female attendance at tournaments and their roles within them must be viewed as a reprimand to noble women's engagement with chivalric culture, his censure here is addressed to a broader female constituency. That is not to deny, of course, the evidence of aristocratic women's ownership of romance, particularly of Arthurian texts.<sup>188</sup> But Vives speaks of fathers, husbands, and the people as a whole as having failed in their duty to exercise control over what women may be allowed to read.

Since not priests nor patriarchs, nor even public opprobrium can be depended upon to protect women, Vives calls instead upon the secular authorities. Common laws and their officers, he argues, 'shulde nat onely loke vpon the courtes & matters of sute / but also maners bothe commune and pryuate.' The first act of moral policing Vives envisages would be to 'put away foule rebaudrye songes / out of the peoples mouthes [...] that no good man can here without shame / nor no wyse man without displeasure', and which, Vives believes, 'seme to haue none other purpose / but to corrupt the maners of yonge folkes.' Vives would, then, begin by placing restrictions upon oral culture. This suppression complete, Vives contends, the law should move to the similar consideration of 'ungracious bokes.'<sup>189</sup> In his original *De Institutione*, Vives proceeds with a trans-European list of '*pestiferis libris*' which the law should censor:

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<sup>187</sup> Carol M. Meale, "'...Alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englissh, and frensch': Laywomen and their Books in Late Medieval England", in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 128-58.

<sup>188</sup> "'...Alle the bokes'", pp. 139-40.

<sup>189</sup> *Instruction*, p. 26.

Amadís, Esplandián, Florisando, Tirant, Tristan, whose absurdities are infinite, and new examples appear every day: Celestina, the brothel-keeper, begetter of wickedness, the *Cárcel de armor*. In France there are Lancelot du Lac, Paris and Vienna, Ponthus and Sidonia, Pierre of Provence, Maguelonne, and Melusine, the heartless mistress. Here in Flanders there are Flores and Blanchfleur, Leonella and Canamoro, Turias and Floret, Pyramus and Thisbe. There are some translated from Latin into the vernacular languages, like Poggio's unfacetious *Facetiae*, *Euryalus* and *Lucretia*, the *Decameron* of Boccaccio.<sup>190</sup>

This bibliography Hyrde faithfully translates, omitting from it only the French prose romance more familiarly known as *Pierre de Provence et la belle Maguelonne*, and the continuation of *Amadís de Gaula*, *Esplandián*. However, to it Hyrde appends a sub-clause of books specific to English audiences:

Amadise / Florisande / Tirante / Tristane / and Celestina ye baude mother of noughtynes. In France Lancilot du Lake / Paris and Uienna / Ponthus and Sidonia / & Melucyne. In Flanders / Flori and White flowre / Leonell and Canamour / Curias & floret / Pyramus and Thysbe. In Englande / Parthenope / Generadis / Hippomadon / William and Melyour / Libius and Arthur / Guye / Beuis / and many other. And some translated out of latine in to vulgare speches / as ye unsauery conceytes of Pogius / and of Aeneas Siluius / Euralius and Lucretia.<sup>191</sup>

Although Hyrde's translation of the *Institutione* is not without occasional, largely minor, omissions from the original, this list of romances represents his only substantial inclusion of additional material. Hyrde's decision so to do may simply reflect a desire to provide practical instruction specifically applicable to his domestic audience; the translator of the first vernacular translation of the *De Institutione* to appear in print, the Italian Giovanni Giustiniani whose Castilian version *Instrucción de la Muger Christiana* was printed in Valencia in 1528, undertook a similar task, adding, as Charles Fantazzi notes, 'suggested further readings more suitable for

<sup>190</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *De Institutione Feminae Christianae: Introduction, Critical Edition, Translation and Notes*, ed. by C. Mattheussen and C. Fantazzi, trans by C. Fantazzi, 2 vols (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1996-8), I, pp. 45-7.

<sup>191</sup> *Instruction*, p. 25. The English romances to which Hyrde draws his readers' attention are *Parthenope of Blois*; *Generydes*; *Ipomadon*; *William of Palerne* ('William and Melyour'); *Libeaus Desconsus* (Libius and Arthur'); *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton*.

his Spanish readers.’<sup>192</sup> However, as Helen Cooper remarks, ‘many of the texts cited here as popular on the continent already also existed in English versions’, and thus a desire to anglicize Vives’s list simply to make it more familiar to an English audience does not fully explain Hyrde’s editorial decision.<sup>193</sup> Cooper argues that Hyrde’s additions are evidence that ‘the conventional moral line [on romance reading] had reasserted itself’ after the early fifteenth century when the emergence of the Wycliffite translation of the Bible meant that:

Romances, with their promotion of traditional stable ideologies including the defence of the Church, suddenly appeared a much more desirable area of reading-matter than the English Scriptures, with their revolutionary potential.<sup>194</sup>

But that reassertion may be a more deliberate one on Hyrde’s part than Cooper’s phrasing suggests: Bevis, Guy and Arthur were, as we have seen, the common targets of earlier strictures; Hyrde’s decision to include them might be considered an attempt to invoke their earlier moral disapprobation. More prosaically, it may simply be that, given the huge popularity of tales of the English national heroes Arthur, Bevis and Guy, Hyrde felt obliged to add them to the catalogue; to ignore them might seem to suggest that English domestic romance did not come within the bounds of Vives’s proscriptive plan.

It is also possible that Hyrde wished to amplify the intention of Vives’s initial listing, which is there not simply to prohibit specific texts, but is a rhetorical technique which suggests that romances are all of a piece: worthless and indistinguishable. James Simpson describes this process of dismissive cataloguing in the context of evangelical iconoclasm, arguing that ‘as writers of different persuasions describe these things in mere lists, one can feel their desire to sweep them away violently.’ Using the example of Erasmus’s lengthy list of relics in his sceptical account of pilgrimage devotion, Simpson suggests that lists of this kind present their

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<sup>192</sup> Fantazzi, pp. 30-31.

<sup>193</sup> *English Romance in Time*, p. 38.

<sup>194</sup> *English Romance in Time*, p. 37.

subject as ‘an infinite, jumbled, unsorted pile of rubbish, the only sane approach to which is hammer and broom.’<sup>195</sup> Hyrde’s additions both emphasise the effect, and ensure that the romances most popular in England become part of this amorphous mess. Nevertheless, whilst the motives behind Hyrde’s editorial policy might be difficult to reduce to a single imperative, his additions, with their focus upon unlikely martial heroics, encounters with the supernatural, romantic liaisons and, often, combinations of all these themes maintain Vives’s rejection of the pleasures of chivalric fantasy. And in this both Vives and Hyrde are influenced by their mutual friend, and, as we have seen ‘editor’ of Hyrde’s translation, Thomas More.

Vives rails against the reading of romance not, as Erasmus had, because of the bad example it sets, but because of its fundamental dishonesty: ‘what delyte can be in those thynges’, he asks, ‘yat be so playne & folisshe lyes?’ In a witheringly dismissive satire of the conceits of the genre, Vives continues:

One kylleth .xx. hym selfe alone / an other .xxx. an other wounded with .C. woundes  
/ and lefte deed / ryseth vp agayne / and on ye next day made hole & stronge / ouer  
cometh .ii. gyantes: and than goth away loden with golde / and syluer / and precious  
stones / mo than a galy wolde cary away.

‘What a madnes is hit of folkes’, the incredulous Vives asks, ‘to haue pleasure in these bokes?’<sup>196</sup> In criticizing them for their obvious lack of verisimilitude, Vives’s criticism can be positioned within a well-established tradition of anti-romantic writings. Its satirical approach, however, may also owe a debt to More’s literary quarrel with the French humanist Germain de Brie (‘Brixius’). In 1518, stung by de Brie’s criticism of his recently-published Latin epigrams, More responded in a long and public letter which was printed by Richard Pynson in 1520.<sup>197</sup> More’s *Epistola ad Germanum Brixium* disparaged de Brie’s 1513 *Chordigeræ Nauis*

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<sup>195</sup> James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and Its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA & London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 21-2.

<sup>196</sup> *Instruction*, p. 25.

<sup>197</sup> Sir Thomas More, *Thomæ Mori Epistola ad Germanum Brixium* (London: Richard Pynson, 1520) (STC 18088).

*Conflagratio*,<sup>198</sup> an account of a battle between French and English naval forces, and especially its hyperbolic description of the exploits of the French captain Hervé. ‘When you described this sea battle in verse’, More accuses Brixius:

you set out not to combine truth with falsehood but to fabricate practically the whole of the story from out-and-out lies, tailoring new facts according to your personal whim [...] With lies which were more than poetic you led out to sea a Hervé who was more than Herculean... You puffed up the sails with Hervé’s noisy huffing [...] You sang of your well nigh factitious Hervé fighting not merely stoutly but prodigiously to boot. You foisted him, dauntless, into the midst of his enemies on the *Regent*, on which he did not once set foot [...] By a lapse of memory (a trap liars often slip into) you made Hervé, whom you had left in the *Regent*, turn up suddenly on the burning *Cordelière*, as if he had two bodies, to deliver himself, there in the flames, of a long winded sermon.<sup>199</sup>

As Robert Adams summarizes, More ‘satirized such heroes as bogus elements of the romance tradition, as falsehoods and physical absurdities, and in effect called Brixius a liar and a fool for attempting to perpetuate idiot-epic conventions.’<sup>200</sup>

Their mendacity notwithstanding, Vives argues that the catalogue of vernacular writings he proscribes should be rejected on qualitative grounds. Fundamentally, they are the products of ignorant writers, men who ‘sawe never so moche as a shadowe of lernyng them selfe’, but rather ‘wrote unlerned, and sette all upon fylthe and vitiousnes.’ These writers, in other words, lack the (humanist) education that would prepare them to write well. Indeed, those that praise such works only do so, Vives claims, because they are similarly hamstrung by their lack of learning: he will believe their acclamation of romances only ‘if they preyse them after that they haue redd Cicero and Senec / or saynt Hieronyme / or holy scripture / and haue mended theyr lyuyng better.’ In this we can see made explicit the sharp distinction Vives makes between men’s and women’s

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<sup>198</sup> Germain de Brie, *Chordigerae Nautis Conflagratio* (Paris: Gerolamo Aleandro, 1513).

<sup>199</sup> Thomas More, ‘More’s Letter to Brixius’, ed. and trans. by Daniel Kinney, in *The Yale Edition of The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. by Clarence H. Miller, Leicester Bradner, Charles A. Lynch and Revilo P. Oliver, 21 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963-c. 1997), III, pp. 549-694 (pp. 601-603).

<sup>200</sup> ‘Bold Bawdry’, p. 38.

reading, in that Vives credits male readers with the power of discernment: if they read the right authors and texts then they will, he implies, naturally lose their former admiration for romance and other fictions. Women, on the hand, cannot be trusted to make the same choice – indeed, are incapable of making it – and thus must be denied all access to books of ‘playne & folisshe lyes.’<sup>201</sup>

All that may be gleaned from the books which Vives lists are ‘a fewe wordes of wanton luste’ which might serve seduction. And if that is all that they might usefully be read for, then it would be as legitimate to write guidebooks to whoremongery: ‘the best were to make bokes of baudes craftes.’ Vives admits that whilst he himself ‘some tyme have redde in them’, he has found them utterly devoid of goodness or intelligence. Indeed, any reader who does enjoy them, Vives states, does so only because of their own lack thereof: either they have ‘neuer touched good bokes’, or ‘they se in them theyr owne conditions, as in a glasse.’<sup>202</sup> Although the change of emphasis is largely implicit, in his eschewal of vernacular writings Vives’s focus is either upon male readers, or a gender-neutral ‘reading public.’ In considering that women might read secular tales, Vives’s principal concern is naturally, given their lack of discrimination, less with women themselves than with those who ought to be exercising control over them, and it is these later who are the subject of his indirect address: ‘And verely they be but folisshe husbendes and mad / that suffre their wyues to waxe more vngratiously subtyl / by redyng of suche bokes.’<sup>203</sup>

Nevertheless, although Vives’s concern here is with the deleterious effect such books might have on female readers, in his *De Officio Mariti*, a treatise on the duties of husbands whose appearance in print in Bruges coincided with the publication of Hyrde’s translation of the

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<sup>201</sup> *Instruction*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>202</sup> *Instruction*, p. 26.

<sup>203</sup> *Instruction*, p. 27.

*De Institutione*, Vives makes it clear that they are equally harmful to both men and women.<sup>204</sup>

There, Vives includes a list of unsuitable books and writers which closely parallels that in the *De Institutione*:

Many works of poetry titillate sensual pleasure [...] A number of these works are written in the vernacular tongue, like Tristan, Lancelot, Ogier, Amadis, Arthur and other similar works. All these works were written by men of leisure with an abundance of paper at their disposal, through their ignorance of better things. These do not only harm women, but men also, as do all things by which our inclinations are prodded to worse things, increasing our cunning, intensifying our thirst for possessions, enflaming our anger or other base desires.<sup>205</sup>

Vives's disapprobation in the *Instruction* is not, however, confined to vernacular writers, nor indeed those writers he adjudges substandard. More pruriently perilous still are those 'moost witty and well lerned poetes of the grekes and latynes / that wryte of loue.' Few writers, Vives admits, are 'more pleasant / more swete / more quicke / more profitable / with all maner of lernyng / than these poetes / Calimachus / Phileta / Anacreon / Sappho / Tibullus / Propertius / and Gallus', but it is precisely because of these qualities that Vives, following Ovid, 'byddeth chaste folkes let them alone.' The concupiscent charms of poets of love, Vives notes, prompted Ovid, in *The Remedy of Love*, to call even for the rejection of his own works, and Ovid himself, Vives continues approvingly, was 'banisshed / nothyng without a cause of yat good prince.' Yet in comparison to Augustus Caesar's famous reaction to Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, few, it seems, are 'any thyng displeased with makers of suche bokes nowe a days.'<sup>206</sup>

Vives's opinion of the insidious appeal of these books, and the corrupting nature of the knowledge that they contain can be inferred from his subsequent admonition that 'a woman should beware of all these bokes / lykewise as of serpentes or snakes.' This is the prime – and

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<sup>204</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *De Officio Mariti* (Bruges: Simon de Molendino, 1529).

<sup>205</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *De Officio Mariti: Introduction, Critical Edition, Translation and Notes*, ed. by Charles Fantazzi (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), p. 123.

<sup>206</sup> *Instruction*, pp. 27-8.



primal – threat that they pose to female chastity, and it is therefore unsurprising that Vives presents that risk in the terms of Eve’s temptation. Speaking once more not to women but to their custodians, Vives proposes a procedure of literary ‘deprogramming’ to be applied to ‘any woman / that hath suche delyte in these bokes / that she wyll nat leaue them out of her handes’:

She shulde nat only be kept from them / but also / if she rede good bokes with an yll will and lothe therto / her father and frendes shulde prouyde that she maye be kepte from all redynge. And so by disuse / forgette lernynge / if hit can be done.

Vives’s justification, that ‘hit is better to lacke a good thyng than to vse it yll’, may appear to qualify a course of action rather less drastic than his earlier, presumably figurative, call for errant women readers to be rendered blind and deaf.<sup>207</sup> But his quietly troubling suggestion is that it may be possible to compel a woman to ‘unlearn’ just as she has learned, and that he imagines such a process to be feasible is a consequence of his conception of female intellect. When Vives considers women’s intellectual capacity, he does so in straightforwardly volumetric terms, believing that the operation of female learning is and should be devoid of their personal agency. Vives views women as no less capable than men in retaining that which they read, but incapable of correctly choosing *what* to read, and he makes this deficiency explicit in the final passage of the chapter where, having dealt at some length with forbidden books, he at last, briefly, touches upon ‘what bokes ought to be redde’.

Vives begins with the familiar, the books that ‘euery body knoweth’ to be appropriate: ‘as the gospels / and the actes / & the epistles of thapostles / and ye olde Testament / saynt Hieronyme / saint Cyprian / Augustine / Ambrose / Hilary / Gregory / Plato / Cicero / Senec / and suche other.’<sup>208</sup> The focus here, then, is unsurprisingly scriptural – the Old and New Testaments and the early Fathers of the Church. This may be leavened with a smattering of

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<sup>207</sup> *Instruction*, pp. 28-9.

<sup>208</sup> *Instruction*, p. 27.

classical philosophy, but only that which provides moral guidance and advice for life. These, then, represent the unobjectionable canon upon which, Vives's inclusive rhetoric asserts, all are agreed, and which should form the unproblematic basis of a woman's reading. To stray beyond these, however, is rather more perilous, and requires that advice on potential reading material be first sought of 'wyse and sad men', who 'must be asked counsaile of in them.' Certainly, 'the woman ought nat to folowe her owne iugement / lest whan she hath but a lyght entryng in lernyng / she shulde take false for true / hurtful in stede of holsome / folishe and peuysshe for sad and wyse.'<sup>209</sup> This absence of discernment, then, requires that a woman's access to books be carefully controlled. Vives reiterates this argument in the *De Officio*, where he directly addresses husbands as gatekeepers of their wives' reading:

But if she knows how to read, take away from her those books of poetry and fiction<sup>210</sup> which I mentioned previously, because our nature is sufficiently prone to evil and has no need of stimulants or that tow or oil be added to the fire [...] Pious books must be put in her hands, which inspire wisely and inspire and enflame her to a holy life. In this regard great care must be taken that childish, superstitious or vain and foolish books not be given to her, many of which are written not only in the vernacular languages but also in Gotho-Latin. She must not have access, either, to complicated writings like abstruse questions of theology. It is not at all fitting that a woman should be curious and inquisitive about such matters. Concerning moral philosophy the pious books are sufficient, for morals are best formed by piety. But if the husband wishes to give her books privately on this subject, let them be books of piety, as I said, which teach and exhort and inspire them to live well, as I said of piety, rather than provoke quarrels and altercations, to which the female sex is already sufficiently disposed of itself.<sup>211</sup>

The *Instruction* does at least envisage some pleasure in these carefully audited texts, suggesting that 'in suche bokes as are worthy to be red' a woman shall find 'all thynges more wytty / and full of greater pleasure / & more sure to trust vnto: whiche shall bothe profite the life / and maruaylously delite ye mynde.' In restating the otherwise analogous argument in the *De Officio*,

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<sup>209</sup> *Instruction*, p. 27.

<sup>210</sup> Fantazzi's translation is perhaps a little misleading here: Vives actually demands the removal of '*libri poetici et nugatorii*' – worthless trifles, rather than the more general 'fiction' (*De Officio*, p. 132).

<sup>211</sup> *De Officio*, p. 133.

however, Vives revises this sentiment. There, presenting reading as simply a means of mental restraint, Vives tells husbands ‘Have her read much about the calming of the passions and tempests of the soul. A woman is in great need of this part of philosophy.’<sup>212</sup>

Having established which texts are appropriate for women, and the necessity for access to them to be tightly controlled, Vives envisages the circumstances in which reading from them might be allowable. ‘On holy dayes contynually / & sometyme on workynge dayes’, Vives admonishes, ‘lette her rede or here suche as shall lyfte vp the mynde to god / & set it in a christen quietnes / and make the lyuyng better.’<sup>213</sup> Vives suggests that, before she goes to mass, it would be beneficial for a woman ‘to rede at home the gospels and the epistle of the daye / and with it some exposition’, before abruptly changing his form of address to speak to the woman directly:

whan thou comest from masse / and hast ouer looked thy house / as moche as perteyneth vnto thy charge / rede with a quiet mynde some of these that I haue spoken of / if thou canst rede / if nat / here. And on some workyng dayes do like wise / if thou be nat letted with some necessary busynes in thy house / & thou haue bokes at hande.<sup>214</sup>

This seemingly straightforward passage of practical instruction in fact encapsulates much in Vives’s understanding of the role that reading and learning should play in a woman’s life. For Vives it must be, above all, a domestic activity – indeed, one over which other domestic duties should take precedence – and one that may only be engaged in in so far as it reinforces the constraints of chaste, confined domesticity. Maintaining control over where a woman may go, and over what a woman may read are, for Vives, necessary constraints that must be instituted in order to prevent her following her natural inclination to unsupervised wandering. Unchecked, a woman will wander physically from the home, in her imagination through fantasies inspired by inappropriate reading, and, as a corollary of these, and most seriously, morally, from the path of

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<sup>212</sup> *De Officio*, p. 133,

<sup>213</sup> *Instruction*, p. 27.

<sup>214</sup> *Instruction*, p. 28.

chastity. For A. D. Cousins, Vives's is a unified programme of monitoring in order to check against these dangers:

Under direction by their husbands married women will make their homes their worlds. The bodies of young women and (or) wives can thus be watched and restrained – but what of their minds? Vives's way of dealing with the mental lives of women was to suggest that a woman's mind be formed by reading assigned to her, not chosen by her, and that therefore the appropriate education of women effect their interior surveillance.<sup>215</sup>

Vives's conception of the role that education, and specifically reading, should play in women's lives is, therefore, like Erasmus's, fundamentally concerned with the application of external, male, control. The humanists' encounters with learned women, whether vicariously, through examples found in Scripture or in classical literature, or in the living models of female chaste erudition that More's daughters are presented as, leave them unable to deny the fact that, in their basic intellectual capacities, women are the equal of men. But women's lack of intellectual discrimination, their inability to tell good literature from bad, the improving from the corrupting, coupled with their predisposition to concupiscence mean that that intellectual capacity must be carefully filled. By filling women's minds to the point of saturation with material carefully chosen to deliver a specific message of docile acquiescence, their governors – husbands, fathers, priests – could ensure the exclusion of all else. Women may read – indeed, women *should* read – but the purpose of that reading is to ensure that women absorb obedience even into their innermost lives. The woman must, as Constance Jordan points out, 'take the terms of her intellectual discourse, her vision of life entirely from men; they must interpret the world for her,

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<sup>215</sup> A. D. Cousins, 'Humanism, Female Education, and Myth: Erasmus, Vives, and More's *To Candidus*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 65 (2004), 213-230 (p. 225).

in both its past and present form.’<sup>216</sup> Vives’s apparent dissatisfaction with the title that was given to his work notwithstanding, an instrument of instruction is precisely what it is.<sup>217</sup>

Both Erasmus and Vives, then, were largely hostile to the reading and hearing of popular secular literature. At best, it represented time wasted that might be more profitably used in reading ‘improving’ works, whether scriptural or classical. At worst, it presented a genuine threat to the development of virtuous and godly character. In Vives it is easier to see a concern with what ordinary people, or more specifically, women, are reading, since his *Instruction* is clearly aimed at an audience more broad than its royal dedication and patronage might suggest. However, that is because, for Vives, the most important qualification in the circumstances of a woman’s birth is that she was born a woman. For Vives, it is femaleness, rather than class which is the defining social classification, and thus all women are perceived as having a weakness for particular sorts of texts. In this sense, Vives is addressing popular literature, for he believes that the appeal and threat of secular stories applies equally to all women. But because in Vives’s perception one woman may just as well stand for all womankind, there is no sense in which the list of secular stories he rails against represents a reflection of actual or even conjectured tastes. Indeed, ‘taste’ and ‘preference’ are entirely irrelevant in Vives’s construction of the woman reader, for those imply choice.

Erasmus appears, in this context at least, to take secular stories less seriously. They can, admittedly, pose a threat to impressionable young minds, and that is important if those are the minds of individuals who will one day wield power, but otherwise they are largely inconsequential. However, Erasmus expressed a far greater deal of concern about the *religious* reading habits of ordinary people, as will be developed in the next chapter. And more important

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<sup>216</sup> *Renaissance Feminism*, p. 118.

<sup>217</sup> Fantazzi, ‘Prelude to the Other Voice in Vives’, p. 13.

than his concern, was a text he produced which was to have a revolutionary effect upon the opportunities for religious reading that those ordinary people were afforded. That text, issued in 1516 from the press of Johannes Froben in Basle, was Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum*, a Latin translation of the Greek New Testament which included the Greek original, and was a work which, as David Daniell notes, 'swiftly translated into most European vernaculars, was a chief cause of the continent-wide flood that should properly be called the Reformation.'<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 113.

### Chapter 3: Erasmus, the Bible and the People

To single out the Bible as merely the most important text in early modern culture – or indeed Western culture in its entirety – would, manifestly, significantly underplay its consequence. It was, as Kevin Sharpe neatly summarizes, quite simply ‘the platform on which the whole edifice of early modern religious, social and political institutions was built.’<sup>219</sup> Even before the movement toward religious reformation began to make the Bible available to increasingly diverse readerships, it was experienced, in different and changing ways, by the universal population across all gradations of lineage, location and literacy. Of course, engagement with the Bible inspired spiritual, scholarly and literary learned endeavour, but, just as significantly, it also underpinned the religious experience of those utterly unlettered, providing a regular, repeating cycle of textual encounters through a faith avowedly ‘of the Book.’ The common laity of pre-Reformation England did not, however, read – or even hear – the word of that book directly. Rather, they experienced the Bible mediated and piecemeal, through catechisms and sermons illustrated by scriptural examples extracted, translated and explicated by the Church. Nonetheless, as R. J. Schoeck reminds us, whilst the community may not have been reading the Bible, their engagement with its transmuted text was a quotidian occurrence:

Inside the churches – in the liturgical life of the Church, in the visual rendering of the Bible and its stories in windows and statues and other carvings, as well as in sermons and prayers – and outside the churches, in pageants, mystery-plays and moralities, and in the private or family prayers within the home: the teaching of the Bible was never far away from the pious. Many laymen and laywomen knew large portions of it by heart. The Bible was not the exclusive province of the pious.<sup>220</sup>

For the pre-Reformation Church, the utility of the authority of the Bible served, as David Daniell argues, ‘alongside the greater authority of the practices and traditions which had grown over the

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<sup>219</sup> Kevin Sharpe, ‘Reading Revelations: Prophecy, Hermeneutics and Politics in Early Modern Britain’, in *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern Britain*, pp. 122-163 (p. 123).

<sup>220</sup> R. J. Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe: The Prince of Humanists, 1501-1536* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p. 177.

centuries.<sup>221</sup> For the pre-Reformation parishioner, then, whilst the Bible might illustrate or inform, the liturgy was, as Duffy suggests, ‘in fact the principal reservoir from which the religious paradigms and beliefs of the people were drawn.’<sup>222</sup>

For the great majority a Bible which was at once a sacred text, and at the same time neither directly accessible nor decipherable, represented a semi-mystical object of veneration, sanctified just as an image or statue of Christ might be, rather than as a guide to righteous living. The Bible conferred authority on its appointed interpreters, whilst providing them with adjunct, subsidiary material with which to guide the congregation through their memorized liturgies and ceremonies. Against this background, it is far from hyperbolic for the often polemical Daniell to insist that ‘the arrival in the 1520s and 1530s of the whole Bible, translated into English from the original Greek and Hebrew texts, and printed for the widest distribution, was a true revolution in the history of the West.’<sup>223</sup>

Nor does Daniell exaggerate the singular importance of Erasmus for the progress of this revolution.<sup>224</sup> In 1516, Johannes Froben printed Erasmus’s *Novum Instrumentum*, a substantive revision of the Latin Vulgate New Testament, with the Greek original printed alongside. It was accompanied by his exhaustive *Annotationes*, which elucidated deficiencies in the Vulgate by reference to the Greek, along with three prefaces, *Methodus*, *Apologia* and *Paraclesis*, and a dedicatory epistle to the pope, Leo. Erasmus’s *Novum Instrumentum* was, then, a work of scholarship, and a work aimed at a scholarly, multilingual audience of learned readers. But in undertaking a new translation, Erasmus explicitly challenged the Vulgate’s monolithic status, suggesting the possibility not just of biblical translation, but of biblical translations, including

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<sup>221</sup> *The Bible in English*, p. xix.

<sup>222</sup> *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 2.

<sup>223</sup> *Bible in English*, p. xix.

<sup>224</sup> *Bible in English*, p. 113.



those in the vernacular. Whether Erasmus anticipated an opening up of the Bible to the wider, less- or uneducated population as a direct consequence of his *Novum Instrumentum* is not immediately clear. But, both in the prefatory Paraclesis which accompanied it and elsewhere, Erasmus makes explicit his desire that the Bible should be made available to all. Indeed, for Erasmus, making the Gospels available to, and understandable to the humblest sorts of people represents one more way of returning *ad fontes*. That much can be seen in, for example, a letter to Adrian IV with which Erasmus prefaced his edition of the *Comentarii in Psalmos* by Arnobius the Younger, in which he suggests that:

The language of the apostles, we may be sure, was the kind of thing in which they have given us the New Testament in writing. That was how wagoners and sailors talked then [...] In those days it was advisable to write like that, because one was writing for the common people.<sup>225</sup>

For Daniell, the comprehensiveness of Erasmus's revision of the Vulgate is such that it represents, in fact, a new translation, 'the first [...] for almost a thousand years.'<sup>226</sup> And whilst others may be more reticent in their description of it,<sup>227</sup> few could argue with the function explicit in the bold title Erasmus gave to his first edition: this '*Novum Instrumentum*' was at once the literal 'New Instrument', or 'new tool' and metaphorical 'New Document' of classical Latin and the 'New Teaching' of its medieval descendant.<sup>228</sup> Although by its second edition in 1519 Erasmus had renamed it as the rather less provocative *Novum Testamentum*, the multiple applications of its initial title were largely fulfilled. Through the extraordinary act of scholarship that his *Novum Instrumentum* represents, Erasmus provided the printed copy-text for the subsequent outpouring of European vernacular Bibles. And in producing an edition in which his

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<sup>225</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 9: *The correspondence of Erasmus : letters 1252 to 1355, 1522-1523*, trans. by R. A. B. Mynors, annot. by James M. Estes (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p. 149.

<sup>226</sup> *Bible in English*, p. 117.

<sup>227</sup> See, for example, *Erasmus of Europe*, p. 187.

<sup>228</sup> On the classical and medieval meanings of 'Instrumentum', see *Erasmus of Europe*, p. 192, n. 27.

Latin translation was presented in parallel with the Greek original from which it was taken, accompanied with copious annotations of the latter and corrections to the errors he had uncovered in the Vulgate, Erasmus both practiced and made practicable for others a scriptural enactment of the humanist imperative for the return *ad fontes*.

Erasmus saw the application of philological techniques to the Greek New Testament as a means towards a restoration of Christian faith, indeed, a means of reforming humanity. But in treating the New Testament as a historical document, by considering it as a product of its time, and subjecting it to the rigours of humanist philology, Erasmus exposed the Vulgate as a sometimes fallible text, subject to the concomitant uncertainties of translation, transmission and interpretation that that entailed. The implications of the *Novum Instrumentum* for established dogma were then, unmistakeable, as Lynne Long describes:

Firstly the reader was reminded that the earliest writing down of the New Testament had been in Greek: Greek codices were therefore one step less removed than the Latin from the events that they depicted. It followed that the authority of the Greek text must be at least equal to if not greater than that of the Vulgate since its origins were older and its function in the context of the *Annotaciones* was to correct the Vulgate's deficiencies. Finally both the Greek version and Erasmus' new Latin translation presented an implicit challenge not only to the Vulgate as a text but also to the theology based on its exegesis.<sup>229</sup>

Moreover, this 'implicit challenge' was not just to the Vulgate as text, no matter how sacred, nor solely to its scholastic expounders, for as Henk Jan de Jonge reminds us, 'the Vulgate was the text on whose phraseology, philosophy, theology, and law had been founded for centuries past. Whoever attacked that phraseology or replaced it with another was undermining the foundations of society.'<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Lynne Long, *Translating the Bible: From the Seventh to the Seventeenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 126.

<sup>230</sup> Henk Jan de Jonge, 'Novum Testamentum a nobis versum: The Essence of Erasmus' Edition of the New Testament', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 35 (1984), 394-413 (p. 405).

Nevertheless, the *Novum Instrumentum* appears to have been a great success, selling, it seems, over three thousand copies of its first two editions.<sup>231</sup> Writing to John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester a few months after the *Novum Instrumentum*'s first publication, Erasmus claimed 'this work caused alarm before it came out, but now that it is published it is marvellously well received by all good scholars or sincere and open-minded men, not excluding theologians.' Moreover, it appears that Erasmus considered his work to be having precisely the effect that he so frequently professed his hope for: 'I am delighted to know that my labours, such as they are, find some favour with men of good will. Many are taking this opportunity to read the scriptures who would never read them otherwise, as they themselves admit; many people are beginning to take up Greek, or rather, this is now common.'<sup>232</sup> Clearly, Erasmus is not talking about the 'common people' here; his expensive *Novum Instrumentum* may have clarified and illuminated the New Testament for those who could read it, but for the vast majority it was no more accessible to them than the Vulgate.

For Erasmus, the scriptural return to the source that his new translation facilitated was more than simply an effort to provide for readings of greater accuracy. As he made explicit in the *Paraclesis* which introduces the *Novum Instrumentum*, reading the Bible is much more than the interpretation of its words, it is an act of sacred incarnation; for Erasmus, the living Christ receives his revivification through the reading of his words: 'these writings bring you the living image of His holy mind and the speaking, healing, dying, rising Christ Himself, and thus they render Him so fully present that you would see less if you gazed upon him with your very eyes.'<sup>233</sup> This manifestation of what Manfred Hoffman terms 'Christ's inverbation in Scripture',

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<sup>231</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 3, p. 220.

<sup>232</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 3, pp. 294-5.

<sup>233</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, 'The Paraclesis', trans. by John C. Orlin, in *Christian Humanism*, ed. Orlin, pp. 92-106 (p. 108).

however, is dependent upon remarkable scholarliness on the part of the reader.<sup>234</sup> As Matthew DeCoursey notes, it requires a reader of consummate humanist philological skill:

It is necessary, if Christ's character is to be seen vividly and accurately, that the details of each story be read well. Therefore one must read each word in the New Testament according to the most accurate possible techniques [...] Each word, in Erasmus' view, must be compared with the usage previous to, and contemporary with, the text under scrutiny. For example, Erasmus discusses whether the Greek word *pistis* in its pagan usage previous to the New Testament can reasonably be translated into Latin as *fides*. This kind of philology requires enormous learning, as the commentator must be able to produce a range of examples of each word, and examine whether they do indeed mean the same thing.<sup>235</sup>

For Erasmus, competent bilingualism is in fact the minimum requirement of the aspirant scriptural scholar, a sentiment he expressed in a letter written to Martin Van Dorp in the year before the *Novum Instrumentum*'s publication, and the controversy that that would spark between the two. There, Erasmus suggests of scholars constantly engaged in attacking one another's work 'how much better it had been instead, while they rend in pieces and are rent in turn, wasting their own time and other people's, to learn Greek, or Hebrew, or Latin at least! A knowledge of these is so important for our understanding of Scripture that it really seems to me monstrous impudence for one who knows none of them to expect to be called a theologian.'<sup>236</sup>

But the shockwaves from the impact of Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum* reverberated far beyond ivory towers, and scholarly readers, and it appears that that was very much his intention. The purpose that Erasmus ascribes to his work, manifest in its dedicatory preface to Leo X, is that it will reach the widest possible audience, a necessity because, Erasmus argues:

our chiefest hope for the restoration and rebuilding of the Christian religion, our sheet-anchor as they call it, is that all those who profess the Christian philosophy the whole world over should above all absorb the principles laid down by their Founder

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<sup>234</sup> Manfred Hoffman, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 82.

<sup>235</sup> Matthew DeCoursey, 'Erasmus and Tyndale on Bible-Reading: Oratory and the Law', *Reformation*, 1 (1996), 157-164 (p. 157).

<sup>236</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 3, p. 130.

from the writings of the evangelists and apostles, in which that heavenly Word which once came down to us from the heart of the Father still lives and breathes for us and acts and speaks with more immediate efficacy, in my opinion, than any other way.<sup>237</sup>

The universal Christian community should, then, be engaged in the search for the spiritual spring, and that injunction applies as much to the labouring rustic as it does to the learned ratiocinator. Erasmus explicitly advocates ubiquitous Bible reading as his ideal for all estates, as, famously, the *Paraclesis* which accompanied his New Testament makes clear:

This doctrine in an equal degree accommodates itself to all [...] It casts aside no age, no sex, no fortune or position in life [...] Indeed, I disagree very much with those who are unwilling that Holy Scripture, translated into the vulgar tongue, be read by the uneducated [...] I would that even the lowliest women read the Gospels and Pauline Epistles. And I would that they were translated into all languages so that they could be read and understood not only by Scots and Irish but also by Turks and Saracens [...] Would that, as a result, the farmer sing some portion of them at the plow, the weaver hum some parts of them to the movement of the shuttle, the traveller lighten the weariness of the journey with stories of this kind.<sup>238</sup>

In this context, Erasmus's *Paraclesis* appears as much an exhortation for the publication of Bibles in the vernacular as it does an *Exhortatio ad Studium Evangelicae Studiones*, or 'an exhortation to the diligent studye of scripture', as it was to become in its first extant English translation, and vernacular editions of the New Testament begin to look like the inevitable consequence of Erasmus's decision to publish the *Novum Instrumentum*.<sup>239</sup>

Imputed intentions notwithstanding, it was rapidly translated into French, German, English and Czech,<sup>240</sup> Erasmus's text providing the basis for both the 'September Testament', Martin Luther's German New Testament published in 1522, and for William Tyndale's English New Testaments of 1525 and 1526 (the 'Cologne Fragment' and the 'Worms New Testament').

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<sup>237</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 3, p. 222.

<sup>238</sup> 'Paraclesis', pp. 96-97.

<sup>239</sup> *An Exhortation to the Diligent Studye of Scripture, made by Erasmus Roterodamus...[with] An Exposition in to the Seventh Chaptre of the First Pistle to the Corinthians* [by Martin Luther], trans. by William Roye (Antwerp: Martin de Keyser, 1529) (STC 10493).

<sup>240</sup> *God's Last Words*, p. 13.

Erasmus subsequently attempted to distance himself from some of the consequences of his publication, and from his popular association with Lutheranism. He responded to a widespread aphorism which figured his New Testament as the progenitor of Luther's 'heresies' in a letter to the humanist teacher Johannes Caesarius: "I laid the egg, and Luther hatched it." An astounding statement by those Minorites of yours, which should earn them a fine big bowl of porridge! The egg I laid was a hen's egg, and Luther has hatched a chick of very, very different feather.'<sup>241</sup>

This, however, was not the perception of English reformers. First in exile and then in England, Erasmus's justifications of vernacular Bibles, and his entreaties for their popular reading were seized upon, and rapidly reproduced in printed translations. And the Bible they wanted all to be able to read was the English translation of Erasmus's New Testament by William Tyndale, the man whose commitment to the promulgation of scriptural understanding was, if the propagandizing of the Protestant martyrologist John Foxe can be taken at face value, directly inspired by the phraseology of Erasmus's *Paraclesis*:

It was not long after, but Master Tyndale happened to be in the company of a certain divine, recounted for a learned man, and, in communing and disputing with him, he drave him to that issue, that the said great doctor burst out into thes blasphemous words, and said, 'We were better to be without God's laws than the pope's.' Master Tyndale, hearing this, full of godly zeal, and not bearing that blasphemous saying, replied again, and said, 'I defy the pope, and all his laws;' and further added, that if God spared him life, ere many years he would cause a boy that driveth the plough, to know more of the Scripture than he did.<sup>242</sup>

And if the historical accuracy of Foxe's account must, necessarily, be treated with some suspicion, nevertheless English reformers did recognize the benefit that re-presenting the arguments in favour of widespread Bible-reading that Erasmus makes in the *Paraclesis* for the

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<sup>241</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus, vol 10: The Correspondence of Erasmus, Letters 1356 to 1534, 1523 to 1524*, trans. by R. A. B. Mynors and Alexander Dalzell, annot. by James M. Estes (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 464.

<sup>242</sup> John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. by the Rev. Stephen Reed Cattley, 8 vols (London: Seeley & Burnside, 1837-41), V, p. 117.

benefit of an English audience. In 1529, an English translation, accompanied by a translation of Martin Luther's commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians concerning marriage and celibacy, by the exiled reformer William Roye was published in Antwerp by Martin de Keyser.<sup>243</sup> Roye's polemical career will be addressed in some detail below, but here I wish to examine a text which accompanied the second English edition of the *Paraclesis*.

By the time that that second, much adapted edition of Roye's translation of the *Paraclesis* appeared, published in London by Robert Wyer around 1534, Roye, it seems, was already dead ('burned in Portyngale', Sir Thomas More suggests, 'as Bayfeld a nother heretyque & late burned in smythfeld tolde vn to me') and Luther's commentary had been quietly dropped.<sup>244</sup> The decision not to print Luther's *Exposition* in Wyer's edition may have been one of straightforward economic expediency, given that the Henrician regime remained staunchly anti-Lutheran, even through the doctrinal opacity of the working out of the king's 'great matter.' Luther's works were amongst those prohibited by a 1529 Henrician proclamation which declared that the popular revolt in Germany in 1525, the *Deutsche Bauernkreig*, had been encouraged 'by the procurement and sedicion of Martyn Luther / and other Heretykes', and that his 'disciples / fautours / and adherents' were swamping England with 'certayne hereticall and blasphemous bokes / lately made and priuely sent in to this realme' in the hope of achieving the same ends there.<sup>245</sup> The same proclamation specifically named two texts associated with Roye as 'Books Prohibited': Wolfgang Capito's *De Pueris Instituendis Ecclesiae Argentinensis Isagoge* known,

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<sup>243</sup> *An Exhortation to the Diligent Studye of Scripture, made by Erasmus Roterodamus...[with] An Exposition in to the Seventh Chaptre of the First Pistle to the Corinthians* [by Martin Luther], trans. by William Roye (Antwerp: Martin de Keyser, 1529) (STC 10493).

<sup>244</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *An Exhortacyon to the Dylygent Study of Scripture*, trans. by William Roye (London: Robert Wyer, 1534?) (STC 10494); Sir Thomas More, *The Confutacyon of Tyndales answere* (London: William Rastell, 1532), sig. Aa4v. According to Foxe, Roye was executed in 1531 (*Acts and Monuments*, IV, p. 696), and if More's account of Richard Bayfield's confession is accurate, it can have been no later than that, as it was in that year that Bayfield himself was burnt.

<sup>245</sup> *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. by Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, 3 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964-1969), I, p. 182.

in Roye's English translation, as *A Breve Dialogue bitwene a Christen Father and his stobborne Sonne*, and *Rede me and be nott wrothe*.<sup>246</sup> And although Henry's government was not above giving the impression of the occasional dalliance with aspects of Luther's theology in the hopes of gaining leverage in its dispute with Rome, it took an increasingly hard line against 'Lutheran' publications throughout the early 1530s.<sup>247</sup> To reprint Luther's commentary in this atmosphere would, for Wyer or any other English printer, have been commercially, not to say personally, disastrous.

Luther's commentary is replaced in Wyer's edition by 'An Exhortacyon to the Study of the Gospell', a translation, possibly by Roye, of Erasmus's 'Letter to the Pious Reader' which had formed the preface to his *Paraphrasis in Evangelium Matthaei*, printed in Basel in 1522.<sup>248</sup> Matthew's was the first Gospel that Erasmus treated in his series of New Testament paraphrases, and in this prefatory epistle he expounds the cause of vernacular scriptural translation with markedly similar phraseology to that of the *Paraclesis*. The two texts, then, share author, subject matter and, frequently, wording, and thus the preface to the *Paraphrasis* makes an obvious choice as companion-piece. Furthermore, Erasmus himself suggests the connection between his preface and the *Paraclesis*, opening the former by reminding the reader:

that I have elsewhere on another occasion affirmed that I strongly disagree with those who think that lay and uneducated people must be entirely kept from reading the sacred books.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, I, p. 185; Wolfgang Capito, *A Breve Dialogue bitwene a Christen Father and his stobborne Sonne*, trans. by William Roye (Strasbourg: Johann Schott, 1527) (STC 24223.3). In the proclamation, the two books are called *A Disputation Between the Father and Son* and *The Burying of the Mass*.

<sup>247</sup> See Craig D'Alton, 'William Warham and English Heresy Policy after the Fall of Wolsey', *Historical Research*, 77 (2004), 337-357 (pp. 340-341).

<sup>248</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Evangelium Matthaei* (Basle: J. Froben, 1522); *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 45. *New Testament Scholarship: Paraphrase on Matthew*, trans. and annot. Dean Simpson, contributing ed. Robert D. Sider (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2008). Quotations are from this modern edition.

<sup>249</sup> *Paraphrase*, p. 7.



Erasmus reiterates the desire for the universal Bible-reading in what is not just a repetition of the sentiments expressed in the *Paraclesis*, but their considerable amplification.

Erasmus argues that the Bible contains spiritual sustenance available and agreeable to all manner of intellectual appetites, and thus he believes that ‘everyone must be allowed “inquiry” – one that is sober and godly – especially into those things that render life better’. Its books are as ‘gardens’, in which ‘a variety of delights grows’, so all should be permitted to ‘pluck what suits him.’ Specifically considering the New Testament, Erasmus reminds his readers of the diversity of the first audience to experience the words of Christ: ‘the indiscriminate crowd including the blind, the lame, beggars, tax collectors, centurions, craftsmen, women and children’. That being the case, Erasmus asks, why should Christ ‘be vexed if he were read by those he wanted to hear him?’ Erasmus reiterates his desire to see the Bible read by all, regardless of their circumstances, and this time enlarges his plea to include even the morally destitute:

If I have my way, the farmer, the smith, the stone-cutter will read him, prostitutes and pimps will read him, even the Turks will read him. If Christ did not keep these away from his spoken words, I will not keep them away from his written words.<sup>250</sup>

Moreover, for Erasmus, whilst vernacular translations of the Bible provide the opportunity for the popularization of Bible-reading, they also allow for the inculcation of a broader religious culture, a scripturally-saturated culture of the people which is entirely informed by and concerned with familiarity with the New Testament. Where, without the new translations, ‘the uneducated and women, like parrots, mumble their psalms and the Lord’s Prayer in Latin, although they do not understand what they themselves are uttering’, Erasmus conceives of a future where the newly accessible and understandable words of the Bible:

should be proclaimed in every language, by every race of men. If it be the ploughman guiding his plough, let him chant in his own language something from the mystic Psalms. If it be the weaver sitting at his loom, let him ease his labour by

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<sup>250</sup> *Paraphrase*, p. 10.

reciting in rhythm something from a Gospel. From the same let the skipper as he steers his boat give voice. Finally, let a friend or relative recite something from this for the matron who sits at her spinning.<sup>251</sup>

This, then, is more than a straightforward appeal for Bible-reading. It is an exhortation for Bible-literacy even amongst the illiterate. It is a call for a spiritual transformation of everyday culture, for its complete penetration by the unmediated Word of the Book. In short, Erasmus's desire is that 'popular culture' (although he does not conceive of it in these terms) and Bible culture become one and the same thing. Whilst some will 'cry that it is an unseemly act if a woman or tanner speaks about Holy Scripture', Erasmus would, he says, 'rather hear some girls speaking about Christ than [...] certain teachers who are commonly regarded as exalted'.<sup>252</sup> Once more, Erasmus views making the Bible accessible to the least educated as enacting a scriptural return *ad fontes*, not just to the circumstances of the Gospels' composition, but to Jesus's life itself: 'This was the class from which he chose disciples of the gospel philosophy, ' he argues, 'not only fishermen and unlettered, but even by nature rather slow to understand, as is apparent from the considerable evidence in the Gospel narrative.'<sup>253</sup>

Erasmus's desire to see the Bible made available to all is not, moreover, merely a hypothetical ideal, and nor does he believe that the simple existence or availability of vernacular Bibles will automatically bring this transformation to pass by some form of scriptural osmosis. It will require, Erasmus argues, practical measures be taken to ensure, not to say enforce, its coming about. And Erasmus has a clear idea of what those measures should be. 'I think I see a way,' Erasmus muses,

by which we may hereafter have people somewhat less unsuited for sacred reading, namely, if a summary of Christian faith and teaching is propounded annually to the Christian people, a summary brief but clear, simple but learned.

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<sup>251</sup> *Paraphrase*, p. 18.

<sup>252</sup> *Paraphrase*, p. 9.

<sup>253</sup> *Paraphrase*, p. 9.

In this way, the laity can never become too distanced from the fundamental tenets of Christian belief. But Erasmus's theological humanism requires that he ensure that this annual inculcation is with the well-spring of Christian faith, with the New Testament itself. After all, if all he was calling for was that the congregation receive regular reminders of the *spirit* of their faith, then there would be no need to replace the sermons and catechisms of Catholic tradition, and this would leave open the possibility of ecclesiastical interference and misinterpretation, the possibility that things might 'be distorted through the fault of the preachers'. To avoid the degeneration or corruption of his proposed programme, Erasmus devises a specifically textual stratagem, a stratagem to guarantee that this annual indoctrination remains unswervingly accurate to the unadulterated letter of the New Testament:

I would like learned and virtuous men to write a short book for priests to read aloud verbatim to the congregation. I want it to be a mixture, taken not from the shallow pools of human literature, but from Gospel sources, from apostolic writings, from the Apostles' creed.<sup>254</sup>

The instructional book that Erasmus has in mind, therefore, is not entirely dissimilar to his own paraphrases of the New Testament, to one of which, we should remind ourselves, this enjoinder was the preface.

If Erasmus's programme were adopted, the result would be to ensure a 'minimum standard' of New Testament knowledge and comprehension in every member of the community. Each would, at the very least, receive a yearly regularized religious 'refresher', regardless of status or education. But the purpose of his programme is to meet the moral and spiritual needs of those less learned in particular, and that much is made clear in Erasmus's consideration of the most efficacious point in the religious calendar for this scriptural summary to be delivered. The extent of Erasmus's ambition is apparent in his declaration that it 'might be done not

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<sup>254</sup> *Paraphrase*, p. 19.

inopportunately during Easter celebrations’, which would place the reading of this (his?) ‘short book’ at the centre of the most important feast of the Christian liturgical year. But just as importantly, Erasmus envisages this new observance replacing populist sermonizing: ‘It would, I think’, he suggests, ‘be preferable to inciting the people to laugh as tasteless and sometimes even obscene jokes – a custom that some evil demon introduced into the church.’ It is necessary, Erasmus concedes, that the Church tailor public worship to appeal to popular tastes if it is to ensure that the congregation are attentive and, more fundamentally, in attendance, but this populist imperative, however, might be far more appropriately met by plain doctrine than by stirring the congregation ‘to laughter with pleasantries of that sort’, which ‘is the work of jesters, not theologians’.<sup>255</sup>

Erasmus’s preface to his paraphrase of Matthew is, then, an explicit and overt entreaty that the unmoderated Word of the New Testament be proclaimed directly to the ears, and thus the hearts, of the commonalty. As such, it can be seen as part of his wider project, his desire to see the unadulterated *philosophia Christi*, restored to accuracy by humanist philology, not only universally available, but universally experienced. Just as his 1516 New Testament enabled the scholarly circumvention of centuries of scholastic adumbration and accreted doctrinal observances, so his paraphrases would, he hoped, perform the same service for the uneducated lay community, would allow even the illiterate to approach the textual fount of their faith.

In the longer term, both the exhortatory message of Erasmus’s preface, and the substance of his New Testament paraphrases were to have an enormous and visible impact on developments in English religious culture and observances. In the later Henrician regime, as through the 1530s it softened in its attitude towards English Bibles – or perhaps more accurately, hardened in its realisation of the political utility of an authorized English Bible as a means of

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<sup>255</sup> *Paraphrase*, pp. 19-20.

reinforcing monarchical absolutism – Erasmus’s influence can be traced in, for example, the Injunctions to the Clergy drawn up by Thomas Cromwell in 1538. These commanded that by the following Easter, each parish should provide ‘one boke of the hole byble of the largest volume in Englyshe and the same set vp in sum conuenient place wythin the said church that ye haue cure of, where as your parishoners may moste comodiously resorte to the same and reade it’ and that:

you shall discourage no man priuely or apertly from the readyng, or hearynge of the sayde byble / but shall expressly prouoke sterc and exhort euey person to rede the same, as that whiche is the very lyuely worde of god.

Moreover, they also followed the Erasmian ideal in providing for the illiterate amongst the congregation, stating that ‘that ye shall make or cause to be made in the sayde churche and euey other cure ye haue, one sermon euey quarter of a yere at the leaste, wherein ye shal purely and syncerely declare the very gospel of christe, and in the same exhort your herers [...] not to repose their trust or affiaunce in any other workes deuysed by mens phanthasyes besydes scripture’.<sup>256</sup>

By the time that the Injunctions were revised under Edward, in 1547, the influence of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer ensured that, to the instruction that the Bible be available in every Church, where parishioners should be encouraged to consult with it, was added a command which followed Erasmus’s exhortation to the letter. Not only were parishes to continue to provide every church with ‘one boke of the whole Bible, of the largest volume in Englishe’, but with each Bible should be ‘within one .xii. monthes, nexte after ye sayd visitacion, the Paraphrasis of Erasmus also In Englishe vpon the Gospelles’.<sup>257</sup> Erasmus’s elucidative influence was to become a physical actuality, his ‘lytle boke’ available to aid the lay folk in their scriptural

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<sup>256</sup> Church of England, *Iniunctions for the clerge* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1538) (STC 10086), 1<sup>st</sup> leaf.

<sup>257</sup> Church of England, *Iniunctions geuen by the moste excellente prince, Edward the .VI...to all and singuler hys louinge subiectes, aswel of the clergie, as off the laietie* (London: Richard Grafton, 1547) (STC 10088), sig. a4v.

understanding. Moreover, Erasmus was to be the authorizing exegete for even the clergy themselves, since a further item decreed that:

euery Person, Uicar, Curate, Chauntrye preeste and stipendarye, being vnder the degree of bachilar of Diuinitie, shall proide, and haue of hys awne, within three monethes after this visitacion, the new Testament, both in Latyn and in English, with Paraphrasis vpon the same of Erasmus, and diligently studye thesame, conferringe the one with the other.

Their biblical exposition thus guided by Erasmus posthumous presence, they might then be trusted to ‘euery Sondaye and holy daye [...] playnely and distinctly, reade, or cause to be redde, one chapter of the new Testament in Englishe’.<sup>258</sup>

Thirty years after its initial composition, then, the programme of supported, not to say enforced Bible-reading that Erasmus’s outlines in his preface was being implemented, on the authority of the English religious establishment, with no small degree of attention to the specific terms of his exhortation. By that time, of course, political and theological circumstances in England were radically altered from those which had pertained in the late 1520s. However, it was at that early point at which English reformers not only recognized the potential presented by Erasmus’s translation and exhortations for a radical reconfiguration of the relationship between the English commonalty and the Bible, but acted to bring that reconfiguration about.

In the preceding chapters, my concern has been to demonstrate the ways in which particular individuals attempt to construct models of interaction between non-elite readers and books. For Caxton, the model of reading which he offers is one which attempts to replicate a representation of courtly reading habits, but for the benefit of a new, bourgeois reading-public. By reading from a well-established canon of medieval authors, an urban, mercantile audience learn to imitate not just the nobility’s pastimes, but their manners of speech and writing. The reading lesson Caxton offers is not new, but the audience to which he presents it is. Vives’s

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<sup>258</sup> *Iniunctions* (1547), sig. b4r.

model of female readership is, to some extent, no less traditional, although it is from the Church Fathers and, particularly, Jerome, that he gains his understanding of female nature. His apparently radical promotion of female scholarship and the benefits that reading might garner for women is, therefore, compromised by the limitations of that understanding. Women may, and indeed should, learn through reading, but to a single purpose: the protection of their chastity. Where the humanist programme for male readers opens up a world of overlapping texts and authors with which a man may arm himself with the rhetoric and eloquence he will need in his engagement with the wider world, Vives's reading plan for women needs to restrict and delimit the range of their imaginative wandering. Women's reading, like their lives, must be confined, and confining. Erasmus's proposed model of reading, or at least the one he proposes in the *Paraclesis* and *Paraphrase* is something rather more radical. In it, Erasmus establishes the appropriateness of direct engagement with the unmediated word of the Bible for the humblest and least educated – in fact, entirely uneducated – of people. And he does so by drawing direct comparison between those who followed Jesus, his audiences and the Apostles, and the poor or uneducated folk of his own day. This, then, is an impeccably humanist, *ad fontes* justification for popular Bible-reading, a model in which Erasmus's calls for the New Testament to dislodge popular stories and tales from their place in popular culture.

Very different though these models are, they share a common structural basis in the fact that they are just that: models. Caxton's is at least informed by an economic imperative: he would not, it seem safe to assume, propose a model of reading that he did not think would sell, but it is aspirational, rather than reflective. Vives and Erasmus wish to impose their particular models upon their subjects, and thus write not to them, but to those whom they conceive of as their moral and spiritual governors. They may exhort and instruct their subjects to adhere to the

reading programmes that they propose, but they are little concerned with the dynamics of their subjects' engagement with texts, with what the popular reader might bring to, or want from, the books which they should be reading. However, those who took on the challenge of Erasmus's exhortation, who used his *Novum Instrumentum* as the means to make access to the Bible a universal opportunity were, necessarily, rather more aware of their readers' needs. Erasmus's model is a projection, a version of what might be which, however earnestly wished for, is a hypothesis. When reform-minded individuals began to act upon that hypothesis, both in England and on the continent, then Erasmus was, as we have seen, distinctly discomfitted by the consequences, and his association with them. It is to the writings of the reformers, then, the models of popular readership which they proposed, and to the conservative's response to them, that I now wish to turn.



#### Chapter 4: Reformed Readers and Wrong Readings

Of central concern to the historiographic debates which have dominated studies of the Reformation, or indeed ‘reformation’ or ‘reformations’ in England over recent decades have been often discordant readings of the involvement of majority of the populace in the progress and process of the reconstitution of religious life and practice over the course of the sixteenth century.<sup>259</sup> Where a teleological ‘Whig-Protestant’ account of the English Reformation as the triumphant working of God’s will once held sway, the work of A. G. Dickens, and in particular his 1964 *The English Reformation* appeared to establish as orthodoxy a perspective in which Catholicism’s displacement was, if not predestined, then at least inevitable, and, moreover, the product of a popular anticlericalism in which, as Hans J. Hillerbrand summarizes, ‘the persistence of Lollard heresy in the early sixteenth century, coupled with the influx of Lutheran ideas made for a programme of religious (and societal) reform that was born by the English people.’<sup>260</sup>

However, since the 1970s, that viewpoint has suffered a sustained challenge from what Nicholas Tyacke characterizes as ‘a prolonged bout of revisionist enthusiasm.’<sup>261</sup> In this, writers such as Christopher Haigh, J. J. Scarisbrick and Eamon Duffy, drawing upon local records, churchwardens’ accounts and wills, have argued that there was no great groundswell of support

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<sup>259</sup> It is difficult, not to say impossible to find terms which adequately describe both these historical processes and the individuals involved in them that are devoid of ideological weight. ‘Protestant’ is anachronistic in England before the middle of the sixteenth century, and in descriptions such as ‘reformers’ is an inferred improvement between one historical situation and another. These are, however, generally-understood descriptions and thus I have chosen to retain them.

<sup>260</sup> A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1964); Hans J. Hillerbrand, ‘Was There a Reformation in the Sixteenth Century?’, *Church History*, 72 (2003), 525-552 (p. 535).

<sup>261</sup> Nicholas Tyacke, ‘Re-thinking the “English Reformation”’, in *England’s Long Reformation, 1500-1800*, ed. by Nicholas Tyacke (London: University College London Press, 1998), pp. 1-32 (p. 2).

for religious change amongst a Tudor population who, for some time even after the break with Rome, remained Roman Catholic in all but name.<sup>262</sup> That population, they suggest, particularly in less closely-monitored rural communities, maintained many of their traditional religious habits – often relocating them outside the Church and adapting them into what appeared to be secular rather than religious festivities – even in the face of state persecution, and unwillingly endured a Reformation entirely imposed from above, the ‘accidental by-product of Tudor politics.’<sup>263</sup> As Christopher Haigh has it, ‘religious change was governed by law, and law was the outcome of politics.’<sup>264</sup> These historians do not discount the fact that there was a degree of pressure to reform certain religious practices and organizational structures coming from within the English ecclesiastical establishment in the early years of the sixteenth century. Nor do they deny the presence of both a long-standing heretical Lollard tradition, particularly in London and the south-east, and proto-Protestant evangelical sympathisers within government and the universities. But the reforming impetus, the revisionists argued, had existed in the medieval Church long before the upheavals of a determinedly Henrician reformation, whilst the influence of a small number of Lollards and evangelicals was negligible compared to that of the machinery of state.

This re-interpreted reading of the Reformation, and in particular Duffy’s exhaustively researched thesis had, by the turn of the century, to some perspectives established the essentially conservative nature of sixteenth century religious lay culture as something of a new orthodoxy in Reformation studies. But whilst the revisionists’ work may have provided a necessary corrective to a particular strain of theologically-informed argument, and successfully challenged once

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<sup>262</sup> See, for example, J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); *The English Reformation Revised*, ed. by Christopher Haigh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992); Eamon Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>263</sup> ‘Re-thinking the “English Reformation”’, p. 2.

<sup>264</sup> *English Reformations*, p. 21.

widely-held, but little-tested assumptions about the unpopularity of the Catholic church and its institutions amongst its early-Tudor congregations, it has been much less successful in explaining the eventual success of reform. It has, as Patrick Collinson observes, made it 'harder rather than easier to explain the Reformation'; harder rather than easier to answer the question Collinson poses, the question of how England, 'one of the most Catholic countries became one of the least.'<sup>265</sup> For as Duffy himself notes, 'by the end of the 1570s whatever the instincts and nostalgia of their seniors, a generation was growing up which had known nothing else, which believed the Pope to be Antichrist, the Mass a mummary, which did not look back to the Catholic past as their own, but another country, another world.'<sup>266</sup>

More recently, scholars attempting to solve this puzzle have questioned both the wholly political explanation for Protestantism's ascendancy, and the argument that it largely displaced, in which the English Reformation was represented as a religious revolution, founded upon the reforming zeal of a population united in their desire to throw over an abusive Catholic hierarchy. Collinson suggests that, rather than interpret the Reformation in terms of the success or failure of a particular agenda, one way in which these apparently competing visions can be balanced is to view them as elements of a prolonged, dynamic relationship of elaborate and fluctuating entanglements. 'The working out of an English Reformation that was in fact drastic', Collinson argues, 'was a dialectic involving the most effective, if by no means most powerful, monarchy in Europe, which expected to be obeyed and for the most part was, and a nation that for all its regional and local variety was cohesive and already constituted some kind of civil society.'<sup>267</sup> For Collinson, historiographies which prioritize either side of the equation in this dialectic at the

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<sup>265</sup> Patrick Collinson, 'Comment on Eamon Duffy's Neale Lecture and the Colloquium', in *England's Long Reformation*, pp. 71-86 (p. 75).

<sup>266</sup> *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 593.

<sup>267</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Reformation* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), p. 106.

expense of the other, which overemphasize the agency of, say, monarch or multitude, are necessarily misconstrued. Ethan Shagan makes the case more forcefully in *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, where he asserts that ‘revisionist historians have simply inverted existing scholarship rather than questioned its assumptions’,<sup>268</sup> and argues convincingly that the English Reformation was rather the product of a complex series of interactions between the people and the state:

It was [...] a Reformation of strange bedfellows and nitty-gritty practicalities, negotiated and finessed rather than won. That the English Reformation *might* have followed this path was made possible by the politically adulterated nature of the state-sponsored Reformation itself and the government’s saturation of its religious policies with economic rhetoric and appeals for popular support; that it *did* follow this path depended upon the ability of ordinary English subjects to respond actively and creatively to what they were told. English people did not merely obey the commands of their government but also shaped the meanings of those commands, investing their reactions to the Reformation with significance for their own economic, social and political lives.<sup>269</sup>

In this persuasively nuanced reading, a reforming agenda set by government legislation was frequently adapted and exploited by a population quick to recognize where it was in concord with their own interests. In this, Shagan posits, the Reformation ‘was not done *to* the people, it was done *with* them.’<sup>270</sup>

The complexity of this interplay between old and new faiths and habits has been illuminated by work which has been more specifically concerned with examining material closely associated with the culture of the general population, and of more relevance to studies of popular reading. Analyses of ephemeral textual productions of the second half of the sixteenth century – ballads and broadsides, chapbooks and jest books, pamphlets of murders and monstrous births – have done much to suggest that the process of ‘protestantization’ was a fluid

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<sup>268</sup> Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 160.

<sup>269</sup> *Popular Politics*, p. 303.

<sup>270</sup> *Popular Politics*, p. 25.

one, characterized as much by the absorption, modification or displacement of Catholic popular proclivities, as by their wholesale replacement. Tessa Watt's invaluable *Cheap Print and Popular Piety* suggests some of the ways in which the 'traditional Christian imagery' no longer available in church remained accessible – albeit in this new, protestantized form – to a visually literate populace, in inexpensive prints which blended iconographic and textual form with oral and literate function.<sup>271</sup> The material Watt examines incorporates, as Ronald Hutton notes:

both a Bible-centred Protestantism and a traditional visual piety in a fashion which repressed a sense of confrontation between new and old forms and emphasized instead a continuing interest in death, salvation, miracles, prodigies, heroic action and moral behaviour which transcended religious reform.<sup>272</sup>

Alexandra Walsham uses loosely analogous 'popular' material – in this case providential accounts of catastrophic events and natural disasters, drawn from sermons, ballads and pamphlets, and the writings of Protestant seers – to demonstrate both the tenacity of pre-Reformation popular cultural beliefs, and the ways in which Protestantism was able to assimilate them, dividing them from the broader Catholic theology of which they had once been a part.<sup>273</sup> Similarly, Peter Lake and Michael Questier's dizzyingly wide-ranging exploration of the correlative relationship between the subjects of lurid cheap print, theatrical productions, sermonizing and Protestantism, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, suggests that 'protestantism was not as strange, as alien, to popular religious expectations and beliefs as we have been led of late to believe.'<sup>274</sup> These are, then, long-views of 'England's long Reformation', pluralist perspectives which are able to trace the tortuous routes of ambivalence and multivalence, survivals and

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<sup>271</sup> *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, p. 131.

<sup>272</sup> Ronald Hutton, 'The English Reformation and the Evidence of Folklore', *Past and Present*, 148 (1995), 89-116 (p. 90).

<sup>273</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); see also Julie Crawford, *Marvellous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2005).

<sup>274</sup> Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists, and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 315-316.

habituations by which England came to be a Protestant nation through what Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie describe as ‘the gradual “inculturation” of Protestant ideas over the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.’<sup>275</sup>

However, whilst individual historians may have sought for explanations for the English Reformation in elite or proletarian politics and economics, in local circumstances or in international power relationships, in rapid changes wrought by significant individuals, or in the slow-creeping movement of centuries-long cultural developments, they necessarily share an interest in attempting to recover a sense of what the attitudes and reactions of the wider population were to the indisputably profound changes that the process of the Reformation wrought upon their lives. And because popular attitudes, unless accompanied by extremes of action, are so rarely recorded, because, on those rare occasions where they are, they are unlikely to be presented with any degree of neutrality, popular reading, popular culture, and popular attitudes, where they may be recovered or reconstructed, are of huge significance.

Against this background, it may appear perverse to focus upon the importance of a single material object in a seemingly traditional – not to say outdated – Bible-centred reading of the Reformation. But if the subject under consideration is just that – the reading of the Reformation – then it would be no less perverse to fail to address the centrality of the vernacular Bible in English as a locus of anxiety, dispute, and (often literally) violent debate. This is not to suggest that the appearance of an English Bible (or ‘Tyndale’s Bible’, or ‘Coverdale’s Bible’, or ‘Cranmer’s Bible’ for that matter) can be usefully represented as the cause of the English Reformation, any more than Henry’s divorce, or anticlericalism once were; simplistically concatenated interpretations appear reductive, not to say redundant, in a climate where, as

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<sup>275</sup> Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie, ‘Introduction: Protestantisms and their Beginnings’, in *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, ed. by Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 3.

Walsham both states and demonstrates, ‘the debate about the English Reformation is...in the process of being refocused’ with interest ‘shifting from why and when to how England became a Protestant nation.’<sup>276</sup>

But if the appearance and sudden and widespread availability of vernacular Bibles in England in the 1530s and 1540s cannot, then, be represented as the *causa causans* of the complex processes of protestantization that historians like Walsham and Lake trace through the later years of that century and the early part of the next, the vituperative debates which surround their production, promotion and prohibition, their authorship, authority and authorization, are minutely concerned not just with reading, but specifically with popular reading. Both those advancing the cause of the English Bible, and those determined to see it suppressed are, of course, less concerned with educated elites, for whom the Latin Vulgate was already accessible, both physically and linguistically. The importance of the vernacular English Bible, for both its supporters and its opponents, is that it opens the world of the Word to entirely new audiences, to enthusiastic readers and listeners, from the ‘upwardly-mobile’ urban artisan to the emblematic illiterate ploughman, for whom access to Holy Writ unmediated by religious authority is suddenly a real possibility. Both reformers and their opponents, then, share a fundamental concern with, and anxiety about, the way in which popular audiences engage with the Bible, and that preoccupation I hope to illuminate as we move to considering the ways in which both sides construct that popular engagement. Moreover, as I hope to demonstrate, in the case of the London Lollard trials of the late 1520s that were to some extent a consequence of that engagement, we have evidence – fragmentary, unreliable, but evidence nonetheless – of the ways in which readers themselves conceived of that relationship.

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<sup>276</sup> *Providence*, p. 5.

Whilst Erasmus and Luther expended considerable energy and print in establishing the precise differences between their respective theological positions, for the early English evangelicals there was a perception that they were, at the very least, from the same brood. William Tyndale, as we have seen, appears to have been directly inspired by Erasmus's *Paraclesis* in his desire to translate the New Testament into English. That causal relationship may be most forcefully propounded by Foxe in his *Acts and Monuments*, but it is certainly implied by Tyndale's own account of the process by which he came to undertake his Bible translations. In his prefatory letter 'W. T. to the reader' which introduces the 1530 *Pentateuch*, Tyndale explains that, despairing that the 'malicious and wily hypocrites' of the English church were concerned only with, 'wresting the scripture unto their own purpose clean contrary unto the process, order and meaning of the text' all to the purpose of misleading 'the unlearned lay people', he was moved to attempt a translation of the New Testament. That, he continues, 'even in the bishop of London's house I intended to have done it.'<sup>277</sup> In choosing Cuthbert Tunstal as prospective patron, Tyndale was likely aware not only of the bishop of London's longstanding friendship with Erasmus, but perhaps also of the role Tunstal had played in assisting Erasmus in the preparation of the second edition of his New Testament in 1516 and 1517.<sup>278</sup>

Rejected by Tunstal, and having famously found that 'not only that there was no room in my lord of London's palace to translate the new testament, but also that there was no place to do it in all England', Tyndale swiftly decamped to the continent.<sup>279</sup> There, it has been suggested, he visited Hamburg and then Wittenburg, 'to consult with Luther in the place where the Protestant

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<sup>277</sup> *Tyndale's Old Testament: being the Pentateuch of 1530, Joshua to 2 Chronicles of 1537, and Jonah*, ed. by David Daniell (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 3-4.

<sup>278</sup> On the assistance given to Erasmus by Tunstal, see Charles Sturge, *Cuthbert Tunstall: Churchman, Scholar, Statesman, Administrator* (London, New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1938), pp. 54-55.

<sup>279</sup> *Tyndale's Old Testament*, p. 5.



revolution began.<sup>280</sup> There is, in fact, no evidence to suggest that such a conference took place, but Tyndale certainly took vicarious counsel from both Luther and Erasmus in producing the first printed English translations of the Greek New Testament in part at Cologne in 1525, and then in full at Worms in 1526.<sup>281</sup> In doing so, he worked, as Brian Cummings notes, ‘from the Greek text of Erasmus’ edition, in consultation with Erasmus’ Latin translation, the Vulgate (more occasionally), and Luther’s German translation of 1522.’<sup>282</sup>

Tyndale did not, it seems, necessarily believe that his New Testament was the instrument by which the humblest sorts of people might gain a full understanding of the scriptures, but rather an advance towards that aim. Of the abandoned Cologne New Testament, only Tyndale’s prologue and twenty-two chapters of Matthew had been printed before he was forced to flee to Rome,<sup>283</sup> but from the ‘Prologge’ comes Tyndale’s suggestion that others more gifted in languages should read and correct his translation.<sup>284</sup> Tyndale’s sense that his is an as yet unfinished project is made more explicit in the letter ‘To the reder’ with which he ends the Worms New Testament, in which he hopes that for ‘Them that are learned Christenly [...] the rudnes off the worke nowe at the fyrst tyme, offende them not.’ Rather, Tyndale suggests, they should understand that his New Testament is simply a stage on the route towards an ideal, exemplary edition, and thus they should ‘Count it as a thyng not havynge his full shape, but as it were borne afore hys tyme, even as a thing begunne rather then fynnesshed.’ Having made this plea, Tyndale outlines the means by which, given the opportunity, the ideal translation might be

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<sup>280</sup> *God’s Last Words*, p. 28. See also J. F. Mozley, *William Tyndale* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1937), p. 48.

<sup>281</sup> *The Bible in English*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>282</sup> *Literary Culture*, p. 191

<sup>283</sup> That, at least, is all that has survived. According to Johann Cochlaeus’s well-known account of the aborted New Testament, ‘in order of the quires they had got as far as letter K.’ (Cited by A. W. Pollard in his introduction to *The Beginning of the New Testament Translated by William Tyndale, 1525: Facsimile of the Unique Fragment of the Uncompleted Cologne Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. ix.

<sup>284</sup> *The Beginning of the New Testament*, sig. a2r.

achieved, a process which will require, in the first instance, his own careful re-editing and re-translating. ‘In tyme to come (yf god have apoynted us thereunto)’, Tyndale anticipates, ‘we will geve it his full shape: and putt out yf ought be added superfluusly: and adde to yff ought be oversene thorowe negligence’. The purpose of this process, however, is not merely to correct the erroneous, but specifically to make the translation as accessible as possible; Tyndale will, as he continues:

enfoarce to brynge to compendeousness, that which is now translated at the lengthe, and to geve lyght where it is requyred, and to seke in certayne places more proper englysshe, and with a table to expounde the wordes which are nott comunly used, and shewe howe the scripture useth many wordes, which are wotherwyse understonde of the common people: and to help with a declaration where one tonge taketh nott another. And will endever ourselves, as it were to sethe it better, and to make it more apte for the weake stomakes.

Tyndale is, therefore, both acknowledging his intention to make the New Testament available, and comprehensible, to the ‘common people’, but also admitting that, in its current incarnation, it may prove beyond their understanding. Its shortcomings confessed, Tyndale appeals once again to the educated reader, calling upon them to assist in the enlightenment of the nescient, desiring ‘them that are learned, and able, to remember their dutie, and to helpe thereunto: and to bestowe unto the edyfyinge of Christis body (which is the congregacion of them that beleve) those gyftes whych they have receaved of god for the same purpose.’<sup>285</sup>

Recognising that his New Testament may present particular linguistic difficulties for less learned readers, Tyndale suggests that in a future endeavour it may be necessary to provide some manner of glossarial appendix to direct them. Interestingly, what Tyndale proposes here is a very specific and limited form of guidance, fixing the meaning of difficult, altered or untranslatable words. What he is manifestly not proposing is to provide marginal guides to scriptural

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<sup>285</sup> *The New Testament translated by William Tyndale: the text of the Worms edition of 1526 in original spelling*, ed. by W. R. Cooper (London: British Library in association with the Tyndale Society, 2000), pp. 554-555.

interpretation. Rather, with his simple ‘table’ Tyndale hopes to resolve the tension between the challenges of comprehension that his New Testament might present to less well-educated readers, and the risk that exegetical glosses become commentary, and thus precisely the sort of ‘descanting upon [Scripture] with allegories’ of which he accuses his enemies.<sup>286</sup> For Tyndale, the need to balance universal comprehension with scriptural faithfulness is a source of anxiety, an anxiety which, I suggest, can be detected in a significant difference between the Cologne fragment and the Worms edition. In the former, Tyndale includes ninety-two marginal notes, some drawn directly from Luther’s New Testament, others of his own making.<sup>287</sup> In the Worms New Testament, by contrast, Tyndale excises marginalia entirely.

But that this latter solution is problematic, that Tyndale is aware that it might impact upon his project’s ability to include the broadest possible range of readers is made explicit in his epilogue’s plea to learned Christians: they should assist the wider congregation in their interpretation of the more obscure passages of Scripture by employing ‘those gyftes whych they have receaved of god for the same purpose’ to help them. Where biblical passages can be read straightforwardly and literally, readers should do no more than: ‘Marke the playne and manyfest places of the scriptures;’ where literal interpretations are impossible, ‘in doutfull places’, Tyndale cautions, ‘se thou adde no interpretacion contrary to them: but (as Paul sayth) let all be conformable and agreynge to the fayth.’<sup>288</sup> Tyndale’s concern here is with what the reader – and particularly the less learned reader – will bring to the text in order to make sense of the biblical

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<sup>286</sup> *Tyndale’s Old Testament*, p. 4.

<sup>287</sup> See Daniell, *Tyndale*, pp. 117-119.

<sup>288</sup> *New Testament translated by William Tyndale*, pp. 553-555. Luther makes precisely the same argument in his own treatment of allegory in his *Lectures on Genesis*: ‘these remarks must not be understood to mean that we condemn all allegories indiscriminately, for we observe that both Christ and the apostles occasionally employ them. But they are such as are conformable to the faith, in accordance with the rule of Paul’ (*Luther’s Works*, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan, 56 vols (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), vol. 1, p. 151.

passages which demand to be read as metaphors. And for Tyndale, as we shall see, the only means to guarantee a reading that is ‘conformable to the fayth’ is to test it against Scripture itself.

Nevertheless, whilst Tyndale may have harboured some doubts regarding the accessibility of his translation to the ‘weake stomakes’ of the ‘commen people’ unmediated, it was precisely this aspect of his New Testament that caused gravest concern to the English ecclesiastical authorities, and in particular to Cuthbert Tunstal, bishop of London. Tunstal’s disquiet was expressed in a coordinated and concerted campaign from 1526 onwards which served to refocus the operation against Lutheran and other heretical literature that had been initiated by Cardinal Wolsey, probably in January or February of 1521.<sup>289</sup> Whilst James P. Lusardi ascribes particular significance to the emergence of Tyndale’s fragmentary Cologne translation in prompting a stepping-up of Wolsey’s campaign through late 1525 and early 1526, it was under Tunstal’s direction within the (vast) diocese of London that Tyndale’s texts and their influence on unlearned readers come in for sustained scrutiny.<sup>290</sup>

Tunstal had, it seems, long recognised the dangers that printed, vernacular translations of heretical works presented as a means by which controversial theology could quickly spread amongst the wider population. Writing to Wolsey from diplomatic duties at the Diet of Worms, from which he departed shortly before Luther’s appearance on 17 and 18 April 1521, Tunstal expressed alarm at Luther’s doctrines, and equal concern with the means by which they were being promulgated: ‘Al his bokes be in the doch tonge and in euery manys hand that can rede, as I vndirstond be also in the hungarion tonge.’ If Wolsey wished to avoid the situation that obtained in Germany, where ‘the peple [...] in euery contre be so mynded to Luther’ that they

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<sup>289</sup> For the dating of the commencement of this campaign, see Richard Rex, ‘The English Campaign against Luther in the 1520s’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 39 (1989), 85-106 (p. 86, n. 3).

<sup>290</sup> James P. Lusardi, ‘The Career of Robert Barnes’, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, 8, iii, ed. by Louis A. Schuster, Richard C. Marius, James P. Lusardi and Richard J. Schoek (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 1367-1415 (p. 1377).

‘wold spend a hundreth thousand off ther lyffes’ in his defence, then his course of action should be clear:

cal befor you the printers and bokesellers and gyff them a strayte charge that they bringe noon off his bokes into england, nor that they translate noon off them into english, lest therby myght ensue grete troble to the realme and church off england, as is now her.<sup>291</sup>

This was, of course, precisely the course of action that the appearance of Tyndale’s New Testament in England prompted Tunstal and Wolsey to take.

By October 1526, just a few months after the first printing of the Worms New Testament, Tunstal, was clearly alarmed by the numbers of copies of Tyndale’s translation reaching and being distributed in England.<sup>292</sup> He therefore issued a prohibition ‘to the Archdeacons of his dioces, for the calling in of the newe Testamentes translated into Englyshe’ which stated that, through both ‘reporte of diuers credible persones’, and the first-hand evidence of the appearance of copies of the New Testament itself, it had become apparent to the ecclesiastical authorities that:

many children of iniquitie maintainers of Luthers sect, blinded through extreame wickednes, wandring from the way of truth and the catholike faith, craftely have translated the new testament into our English tongue, entermedling there with many hereticall articles and erronious opinions, pernicious and offensiue, seducing the simple people, attempting by their wicked and peruerse interpretations, to prophanate the maiestie of the scripture, whiche hetherto hath remayned vndefiled, and craftely to abuse the most holy word of God, and the true sence of the same, of the whiche translation there are many bokes imprinted, some with gloses and some without, conteining in the english tongue that pestiferous and moste pernicious poyson dispersed throughout all our dioces of London in great nomber, whiche truely without it be spedely forsene without doubt will contaminate and infect the flocke committed vnto vs, with moste deadly poyson and heresy. To the greuous perill and daunger of the soules committed to our charge, and the offence of gods diuine maiestie.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Sturge, *Tunstal*, p. 361.

<sup>292</sup> ‘*libros noui testamenti in idiomate vulgare, translatos per fratrem Martinum Lutherum et eius ministrum Willmum Tyndall alias Hochyn et fratrem Willmum Roy*’, Sturge, *Tunstal*, p. 132, n. 5.

<sup>293</sup> *Records of the English Bible: The Documents Relating to the Translation and Publication of the Bible in English*, ed. by A. W. Pollard (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), pp. 133-34.

Tunstal's objection to the new Bible translations, at least insofar as it is presented in his monition, is a specific concern with the danger that they represent to the 'simple people.' Tunstal does not concern himself here with whether those 'simple people' should have access to vernacular Scripture at all, but instead argues that they are at risk of spiritual infection from these particular ones, infested as they are with deliberate heresies. Whilst elsewhere, Tunstal suggested that a major objection to Tyndale's New Testament was the huge number of errors in translation – two thousand by Tunstal's count – that it contained, his monition represents it as an engine of Lutheran assault, deliberately designed that the 'pernicious poyson' that it contains will be unknowingly consumed by the less educated. Quite how broad a range of people Tunstal includes amongst the 'simplicium mentium' that he considers to be at risk is difficult to assess, given the audience to whom he is writing.<sup>294</sup> However, when considered in the context of the other fronts that Tunstal was to open in the war with Tyndale's texts, it seems reasonable to suggest that, whilst Charles Sturge asserts that Tunstal was 'like many other learned men, very doubtful of the expediency of placing the whole Bible, without guidance or restriction, within the reach of all', Tunstal's concern was not that Tyndale's Testament might reach a universal readership, but that it might reach the commonalty specifically.<sup>295</sup>

Tunstal charged the archdeacons with ensuring that all amongst their congregations, 'with in .xxx daies space [...] vnder payne of excommunication, and incurring the suspicion of heresie they do bring in and really deliuer vnto our vicar-generall, all and singular such books conteyning the translation of the new testament in the English tongue.'<sup>296</sup> Tunstal's orders were swiftly acted upon, and in October 1526 he presided over a public ceremony at Paul's Cross in

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<sup>294</sup> *Records of the English Bible*, p. 132.

<sup>295</sup> Sturge, *Tunstal*, p. 133.

<sup>296</sup> *Records of the English Bible*, p. 134.

which he preached a sermon denouncing Tyndale's New Testament whilst seized copies of it were burned in a ceremony which, as Alan Stewart notes, 'with its inevitable overtones of heretic burning, quickly became a focal point for Protestant complaint both in England and abroad.'<sup>297</sup> What is clear, however, is that these measures did not, over the following years, prevent Tyndale's translation and other heretical texts reaching England and being read, exchanged and discussed amongst various heterodox communities in London and beyond, many of whose members were drawn from the lower strata of society. And the evidence which helps to establish the failure of this amongst Tunstal's strategems comes from the records of ecclesiastical examinations carried out by Tunstal himself.

January 1528 saw the arrest and confession of John Hacker, a water-carrier of Coleman Street in London, but also, as John Davis notes, 'an evangelist and organizer of the Brethren in an arch of Lollard country beginning with Newbury in the West, swinging down to the metropolis and ascending again to Norfolk and Suffolk in the East.'<sup>298</sup> According to John Strype, who collated long depositions by Hacker and other abjurors from Tunstal's register via John Foxe's papers, Hacker, also known as Ebbe:

was a great reader and teacher about six years past in London, and now in the parts of Essex about Colchester, Wittham, and Branktree [Braintree], being discovered and taken up, was at this visitation, held in January and February, so hard set upon, that he made a discovery, by interrogatories put to him to answer upon oath, of a great many of his friends and followers, both in Essex and London.<sup>299</sup>

The evidence provided by Hacker and those that he subsequently discovered to the ecclesiastical court have long proved useful in analyses of Lollard activity and the trade in clandestine books

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<sup>297</sup> Stewart, 'The Trouble with English Humanism', p. 80.

<sup>298</sup> John F. Davis, *Heresy and Reformation in the South East of England, 1520-1559* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1983), p. 55.

<sup>299</sup> John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials, relating chiefly to religion, and the reformation of it: and the emergencies of the Church of England, under King Henry VIII. King Edward VI. and Queen Mary I*, 3 vols in 6 parts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1822), I, i, p. 114.

within the city and the wider diocese.<sup>300</sup> However, amongst recent examinations of the trials, particularly pertinent to a study of the perception of popular readers is that undertaken by Craig D’Alton. In a detailed analysis of Foxe, Strype and the complex and often confused manuscript evidence related to the heresy trials, D’Alton suggests that it was the appearance of copies of Tyndale’s New Testament in the hands of unlearned Lollard communities that most alarmed the ecclesiastical authorities. Although ‘early English Lutherans would have found little more in common with their Lollard neighbors than a shared anti-clerical impulse and a penchant for English Scriptural translations,’ D’Alton argues, nonetheless, ‘officials of Church and state saw a clear and present threat in Lutheran books reaching Lollard communities.’ And in this, Tunstal in particular, D’Alton suggests, ‘was sensitive both to the possibilities for Lollard expansion offered by the dissemination of Tyndale’s Lutheran translations, and to the opportunities available to Lutheran evangelists to recruit and make use of established Lollard communities.’<sup>301</sup>

Despite the familiarity of the material related to the Lollards’ examination, a selection from amongst the depositions of the accused do bear brief further scrutiny, since they provide not only evidence of ownership of Tyndale’s texts, and of, in the broadest sense, the social background of those who owned them, but more importantly, if only occasionally, reflections on the influence that those texts had upon those readers’ theology. Thus, for example, Hacker’s confession implicates Thomas Hills, or Hilles, servant to Christopher Ravens, a tailor of Witham in Essex. Hills was, according to the deposition, ‘of the same sect, and could read well, and had a

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<sup>300</sup> See, for example, Davis, *Heresy and Reformation*, pp. 55-65; Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 474-79; Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 103-06. I have chosen to use the term ‘Lollard’ to describe these communities, despite its imprecision, and the fact that it appears to have been imposed upon a variety of unorthodox communities, rather than employed as a means of self-description. However, since I am interested in the external construction of particular sorts of readers, and in the absence of a common alternative, I hope that this term can be accepted as a convenient, if imperfect, shorthand.

<sup>301</sup> Craig W. D’Alton, ‘Cuthbert Tunstal and Heresy in Essex and London, 1528’, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 35 (2003), 210-28 (p. 211).



book of the New Testament in English printed.’ Moreover, Hills ‘was a great reader among them.’<sup>302</sup> In this brief accusation, then, we are presented with a man whose social standing is at the very least relatively modest, but who is literate and in possession of what it seems relatively safe to assume is a copy of Tyndale’s New Testament. What is more (and of more concern both to Tunstal and to us) is that Hills is, by implication, transmitting that New Testament to a broader audience of like-minded listeners, including those partially-literate and wholly illiterate to whom it would be otherwise inaccessible. Whether Hills would have been, in Tyndale’s consideration, one of ‘Them that are learned Christenly’, he is nonetheless sharing his understanding with the wider ‘congregation’ in much the same manner for which Tyndale appeals.

On 3 March 1528, John Pykas of Colchester, and, as his name might suggest, a baker, was brought before Tunstal and charged:

that he had, and retained in his keeping, the New Testament in the vulgar tongue, translated by William Hotchyn [Tyndale] and Friar Roy, notwithstanding the condemnation, publication, and monition made thereupon; and other books, containing in them heresy and reprobate reading.

Pykas answered the charges on 7 March, stating that it had been his mother who had introduced him to his new beliefs. Five years previously, she had ‘movyd hym that he shuld not beleve in the Sacraments of the Church, for that was not the ryght way’ and given him a book of Paul’s Epistles, enjoining him to ‘lyve after the maner and way of the said Epistoles and Gospels, and not after the way that the Church doth teche.’ Pykas was, it seems, well supplied with texts. At the time of his arrest he had, he confessed:

in his custody a book, called *The Pryck of Consyence*, and another of the *Seven Wise Masters of Rome*; which he had of a fryer of Colchestre: also a book which begynneth, *O thou most glorious and excellent Lord*, &c. which he had of old Father Hacker, alias Ebbe. Also he had the copy of a book of communication, *inter Fratrem*

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<sup>302</sup> *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, I, i, p. 114.

*et Clericum*, of his brother William Pykas, which he lost by negligence about a twelve months past.<sup>303</sup>

But if these, or at least the first two amongst them, appear rather less than the heretical texts that we might expect such a confession to produce, Pykas's ownership of an English New Testament seems to have caused Tunstal a good deal of alarm. Pykas confessed that he had, around two years previously:

bowght in Colchestre, of a Lumbard of London, a New Testament in English, and payd for it fours shillings. Which New Testament he kept and read thorowghly many tymes. And afterward, when he herd that the said N. Testaments were forbaden, that no man shuld keep them, he delyvered it and the book of Powle's Epistoles to his mother ayen. And so in contynuanse of tyme, by the instruction of his mother, and by reading of the said books, he fell into these errors and heresies ayenst the Sacrament of the Altar.<sup>304</sup>

Thus, in responding to his charges, Pykas gives a specific example of the influence Tyndale's New Testament had upon him: through the twin persuasions of his mother and his reading, Pykas had come to reject the Eucharist. What is more, as Pykas's confession continues, it becomes evident that that which caused Tunstal to be most concerned about the possible spread of Tyndale's New Testament was precisely what had happened within this particular group. Pykas admitted that he had, with many of his co-accused, on several occasions and in various of their houses, argued against the sacrament of baptism, 'saying that ther shuld be no such thyngs: for there is no baptyism, but of the Holy Ghost; and that he learned in the New Testament in English: whereas John saith, *I baptize you but in water, in token of repentance; but he that shall come after me is stronger than I, he shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost.*'<sup>305</sup> These were not, then, new heretical beliefs directly inspired by Tyndale, but in his New Testament they found the scriptural authority to confirm heretical beliefs long-held. Moreover, Pykas was not only sharing the

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<sup>303</sup> *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, I, i, p. 123. On the likely identification of these books, see Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p. 487.

<sup>304</sup> *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, I, i, pp. 118-121.

<sup>305</sup> *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, I, i, p. 122.

understanding he had gained from his own reading of Tyndale's New Testament, but was sharing that Testament itself. In his subsequent evidence, he admitted that he had lent to one Robert Best 'a New Testament in English, which he had in his custody, by the space of a month together.'<sup>306</sup>

D'Alton's persuasive interpretation of the manuscript evidence of Pykas's examination suggests that it was this admission of ownership of a copy of Tyndale's New Testament that swiftly became the principal concern of Tunstal's investigation, since of all amongst the accused, Pykas appears to become the main focus of attention, and, the book having been first mentioned in his evidence of 3 March, 'from 4 March we have an indication of a remarkably learned commission being present to hear proceedings.'<sup>307</sup> However, no doubt as significant in raising Tunstal's apprehension would have been Pykas's admission of the effect that the text had upon him and his group. Ownership of a vernacular Bible allowed them to find scriptural support for long-standing unorthodox beliefs, as it no doubt always would have done, but ownership of Tyndale's Bible, a Bible both contemporary in the clarity of its language, and at the same time originary in the claims to authority of its *ad fontes* provenance, offered a reinvigorating justification for those beliefs. Moreover, Tyndale's translation also brought those Lollard communities, through the illicit book trade, into contact with new, Lutheran unorthodoxies and their promulgators. If Tunstal feared that Tyndale's New Testament might rejuvenate the 'English heresy', he was probably at least partially right; the evidence of those abjuring before him appears to demonstrate that it had, as he had anticipated, been taken up among the '*simplicium mentium*'.

Another of those implicated by Hacker, John Tewkesbury, is also worth further attention here, not least since, if Foxe's bald introduction to the story of his martyrdom is to be believed, he

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<sup>306</sup> *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, I, i, p. 127.

<sup>307</sup> *Tunstal and Heresy*, p. 219.

‘was converted by the reading of Tyndale’s Testament, and the “Wicked Mammon”.’<sup>308</sup> In fact, the material that Foxe provides relating to Tewkesbury’s case does suggest that that was the case, and whilst we might be right to be suspicious of the revisionary Protestant imperative driving Foxe, the assertion is supported by Sir Thomas More himself – accused by Foxe of Tewkesbury’s torture<sup>309</sup> – who, in his *Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer* (1532), ascribes just such powers of conversion to Tyndale’s writing:

And yet all thys notwythstandynge, when he [Tewkesbury] was in the shyryffes warde, and at the time of his deth / he wolde not speke of his heresydes any thyng, nor say that he had helde and wolde holde thys poynt and that / but handeled hym selfe as couertly as he coude, to make the peole wene that he hadde holden no maner opynyon at all / nor neuer had I thynke yf Tyndales vngracyouse bokes had neuer come in hys hande. For whych the pore wreche lyeth now in hell and cryeth out on hym / and Tyndale yf he do not amende in tyme, he is lyke to fynde hym when they come togyther, an hote fyrebronde burnynge at hys bakke, that all the water in the worlde wyll neuer be able to quenche.<sup>310</sup>

Tewkesbury was brought before Tunstal in April 1529, and in the course of his examination was carefully questioned about Tyndale’s books, particularly his New Testament and *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*. Pressed upon errors in the latter, Tewkesbury countered, ‘Take ye the book and read it over, and I think in my conscience, you shall find no fault in it’, before, as Foxe reports, suggesting the further thought, ‘that whosoever translated the New Testament, and made the book, meaning The Wicked Mammon, he did it of good zeal, and by the spirit of God.’<sup>311</sup>

In Tewkesbury’s case, reading Tyndale does seem to have turned a Lollard towards Lutheranism. He confessed that ‘he had studied the holy Scripture by the space of these seventeen years’, so he had had, presumably, a Wycliffite Bible or portions thereof, but it was access to Tyndale’s translation which brought him to self-knowledge, since, as his deposition

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<sup>308</sup> *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. by the Rev. Stephen Reed Cattley, 8 vols (London: Seeley & Burnside, 1837-41), IV, p. 688.

<sup>309</sup> *Acts and Monuments*, IV, p. 689.

<sup>310</sup> *Complete Works of More*, 8, i, p. 22.

<sup>311</sup> *Acts and Monuments*, IV, p. 689.

records, ‘as he may see the spots in his face through the glass, so in reading the New Testament, he knoweth the faults of his soul.’<sup>312</sup> However, close questioning on specific passages from *The Wicked Mammon* revealed Tewkesbury to be, as John F. Davis suggests, ‘a Lollard who had picked up quite a lot from Tyndale and Evangelism’: examined on the doctrine of justification by faith alone, for example, Foxe writes, ‘he said, that if he should look to deserve heaven by works, he should do wickedly; for work follows faith, and Christ redeemed us all, with the merits of his passion.’<sup>313</sup>

Tewkesbury’s abjuration is of particular importance in the context of a study of popular reading for what it can reveal about the social background of the group brought before Tunstal. Or rather, it is useful in this sense for what it reveals of the shortcomings in the surviving evidence for making these sorts of assessments. Writing of John Hacker, the water-carrier whose confession began Tunstal’s examinations, Malcolm Lambert suggests that ‘Hacker spoke effectively to his own kind: in London, for example, he was in contact with a bricklayer, a tallow-chandler, a saddler’s wife, a haberdasher, a pointmaker and some tailors’<sup>314</sup> and in that rather ambiguous ‘own kind’ might be seen a restatement of V. J. Scattergood’s assertion ‘that Lollardy was almost exclusively a lower-class movement.’<sup>315</sup> And whilst, as Shannon McSheffrey notes, ‘Lollardy appears to have been more attractive to men of the lower orders – artisans, rural laborers, and *petits bourgeois* – than to more substantial men’, the subject of the status of the members of Lollard groups has, as she continues, ‘been a matter for debate for several decades now.’<sup>316</sup> A useful note of caution to bear in mind when assessing the social

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<sup>312</sup> *Acts and Monuments*, IV, p. 640.

<sup>313</sup> *Heresy and Reformation*, p. 55; *Acts and Monuments*, IV, p. 690.

<sup>314</sup> Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 2002), p. 392.

<sup>315</sup> V. J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Blandford Press, 1971), p.250.

<sup>316</sup> Shannon McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities, 1420-1530* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 108-109. McSheffrey’s wider point, expanded upon in the chapter

status of the group who abjured before Tunstal in 1528 is made by Andrew Hope, who reminds us that, ‘often their contemporary descriptions as ‘fishmonger’ or ‘baker’ are vertical classifications which can comprehend extremes of wealth.’<sup>317</sup> Tewkesbury’s is a (heresy) case in point here, for whilst it seems unlikely – though not impossible – that he was extremely wealthy, in the varying accounts of him we see his apparent occupation altered and rewritten to serve the polemical or satirical needs of those writing of him.

So, for example, from Strype, we have Lambert’s haberdasher. He is ‘John Tewksbury, haberdasher, dwelling nigh to St. Martin’s Gate [...] another of Hacker’s disciples, and of the same sect.’<sup>318</sup> In Foxe, by contrast, he is the rather more modest ‘John Tewkesbury, Leatherseller, of London, Martyr.’<sup>319</sup> As Foxe continues, the importance to him of presenting Tewkesbury as of the humblest of origins becomes clear. Tewkesbury, Foxe states:

had the Bible written. In all points of religion he openly did dispute in the bishop’s chapel in his palace. In the doctrine of justification and all other articles of his faith he was very expert and prompt in his answers, in such sort that Tonstal, and all his learned men, were ashamed that a leatherseller should so dispute with them, with such power of the Scriptures and heavenly wisdom, that they were not able to resist him.<sup>320</sup>

For the purposes of Foxe’s argument, then, Tewkesbury’s plebeian background is important. That he, despite his origins, is able to best or at least match the bishop in theological disputation is due to his knowledge of Tyndale’s New Testament, and intellectual inspiration from God. But it is not only in the ideologically-driven Protestant narrative of Foxe that a deliberate positioning of Tewkesbury’s trade is useful; from the opposed perspective of Thomas More, he has fallen to

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‘Gender and Social Status’ is that whilst Lollardy may have held little appeal to upper-class men, many of the most prominent women within the movement were of relatively high social status (pp. 108-36).

<sup>317</sup> Andrew Hope, ‘Lollardy: The Stone the Builders Rejected?’, in *Protestantism and the National Church in Sixteenth Century England*, ed. by Peter Lake and Maria Dowling (London, New York and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 1-35 (p. 20).

<sup>318</sup> *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, I, i, p. 116.

<sup>319</sup> An alteration which causes Strype to wonder ‘if he be the same with that John Tewksbury, leatherseller, mentioned in Fox’s Martyrology, under the year 1529’ (*Ecclesiastical Memorials*, I, i, p.116).

<sup>320</sup> *Acts and Monuments*, IV, pp. 688-89.

‘Teuxbery the powchmaker’<sup>321</sup> in a repositioning that allows More to give him a satirical place amongst ‘a rablement of heretikes’ ranged against ‘A worthy number of holi doctours’:

in the construccion & exposycyon of holy scrypture, we sholde of reason better  
byleue holy saynte Austayne / holy saynt Ambrose, holy saynt Chrysostome, holy  
saynte Cyrill, and the thre Gregoryes of Grece all thre, and holy saynte Gregory the  
pope, wyth all the other olde holy doctours and fathers of the faythfull doctryne on  
the tone syde / or els on the tother syde lewde Luther, and Lambert, Barns, Huyskyn,  
and swinglius, Swaretherth, Tyndale, George Ioy, and Denkius, Baynam, Bayfelde,  
Hytton, and Teuxbery, wyth brother Byrt, and yong father Fryth.<sup>322</sup>

None of which is to suggest that the Lollard community brought before Tunstal were in fact misrepresented members of the upper-classes, but rather to caution against the temptation to cast them as a universally lowly.

Clearly, many amongst them were from what might loosely be defined as artisan, craft or servile backgrounds, but their collective appetite for editions of Tyndale’s New Testament and the works in which he defended its Lutheran implications brought them into the ambit of a larger unorthodox collective. So, for example, as the London visitation continued, Sir Sebastian Harris, curate of the parish church of Kensington appeared before Tunstal’s representative Geoffrey Wharton, vicar general of London, and ‘confessed that he had two books, *viz.* the New Testament in the vulgar tongue, translated by William Hotchyn, Priest, and Friar Roy; and *Unio Dissidentum*, containing in it the Lutheran heresy.’ He was absolved once he had sworn ‘by oath upon the holy Gospels, that he should not for the future keep any of the said books, or any other containing heresy in it; nor knowingly read, sell, pawn, or any other way dispose of such books.’<sup>323</sup> The interest of the episcopate here is much less with Harris’s own consumption of the New Testament, but with how he might distribute it. Indeed, if we take the injunction upon its

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<sup>321</sup> *Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, 9, ed. by J. B. Trapp (New Haven and London: Yale university Press, 1979), p. 94.

<sup>322</sup> *Complete Works of More*, 9, p. 29.

<sup>323</sup> *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, I, i, p. 118.

reading to refer to the public rather than the private, than it might be argued that that is their *sole* interest.

Just such an encounter between Scripture-hungry Lollards and English converts to continental Lutheranism is demonstrated in the well-known confession of John Tyball, in which he admitted that he and Thomas Hills, the tailor's servant, 'came to London to Frear Barons, then being at the Freers Augustines in London, to buy a New Testament in Englishe.' This 'Frear Barons' was Robert Barnes who had been released into the custody of the Austin Friary after a spell in the Fleet Prison, the consequence of a sermon that he had preached in Cambridge on Christman Eve 1525, and which, it seems, attacked clerical corruption in general, and Wolsey in particular. Having persuaded Barnes to write a letter to Sir Richard Cox, curate of their home parish of Steeple Bumpstead as part of their – ultimately successful – efforts to convert the curate to their beliefs, Hills and Tyball showed Barnes 'certayne old bookes that they had: as of iiii. Evangelistes, and certayne Epistles of Peter and Poule in Englishe.' Barnes, it seems, was not very impressed with these, presumably rather dog-eared texts, and 'made a twyte of it, and sayd, A poynt for them, for they be not to be regarded toward the new printed Testament in Englishe. For it is of more cleyner Englishe.' Barnes sold them a copy of the English New Testament for three shillings and two pence, telling them that, in comparison, the New Testament in Latin was like 'a cymball tynkklyng, and brasse sowndyng.'<sup>324</sup> Barnes's allusion here is to the thirteenth chapter of Paul to the Corinthians, where it is, in Tyndale's translation, 'Though I speake with the tonges of men and angels, any yet had no love, I were even as a soundyng brasse: and as a tynklyng Cynball.'<sup>325</sup> In other words, the Latin New Testament is a series of empty sounds, without signification.

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<sup>324</sup> *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, I, ii, p. 54.

<sup>325</sup> *New Testament Translated by William Tyndale*, p. 369



The success of Tunstal's efforts to identify this Lollard community and its contacts within the illegal book-trade notwithstanding, Tyndale's works remained the subjects of specific focus from the English ecclesiastical, and indeed temporal authorities. Henrician legislation of 1529 and 1530 aimed at the suppression of heretical works and unlicensed Bible translations would seem to suggest that it was Tyndale that caused the English regime more anxiety than any other heretical writer. The proclamation 'Enforcing Statutes against Heresy; Prohibiting Unlicensed Preaching, Heretical Books' (dated to before 6 March 1529) is of interest not least because it makes a connection between heretical books, Lollards, Luther and rebellion. The proclamation's stated target is those

malicious and wicked sects of heretics and Lollards who by perversion of Holy Scripture do induce erroneous opinions, soweth sedition among Christian people, and finally do disturb the peace and tranquility of Christain realms, as late happened in some parts of Germany, where by procurement and sedition of Martin Luther and other heretics were slain an infinite number of Christian people.

But of more relevance here is the list of individual 'books prohibited' which is appended to it. Of the fourteen heretical works specified,<sup>326</sup> *'The Chapters of Moses, Called Genesis'*, *'The Chapters of Moses, Called Deuteronomy'* and *'The Practice of Prelates'* are all Tyndale's, and Tyndale has been suggested as editor or part-editor of both the *'A.B.C. Against The Clergy'* and *'The Examination of William Thorp.'*<sup>327</sup> In a similar proclamation of 22 June 1530, 'Prohibiting Erroneous Books and Bible Translations', two out of five named banned publications are Tyndale's: *The Wicked Mammon* and *The Obedience of a Christian Man*.<sup>328</sup> This is not, of

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<sup>326</sup> The proclamation actually lists fifteen, but two sepately listed titles - *The Exposition of The Seventh Chapter of The First Epistle to The Corinthians* and *The Matrimony of Tyndale* - are actually the same book, not, in fact by Tyndale, but more likely William Roye's translation of Luther's commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians concerning marriage and celibacy, previously discussed.

<sup>327</sup> *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. by Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, 3 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964-1969), I, pp. 181-5; for Tyndale's putative editorial involvement with the last two texts, see *A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and a Husbandman*, ed. by Douglas H. Parker (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 36-8.

<sup>328</sup> *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, I, p. 194.

course, *prima facie* evidence of the popularity of Tyndale's works, much less his New Testament specifically, but it does help to establish Tyndale's position as one of the prime movers of heretical texts, at least in the perception of the English regime.

Prohibition, confiscation and incineration were not, it appears, sufficient to check the flow of Tyndale's texts, nor the expanded list of Latin and vernacular texts that were subsequently added to Tunstal's prohibition,<sup>329</sup> and therefore in March 1528, Tunstal asked his long-time associate and friend Thomas More to read and refute the writings of 'certain children of iniquity who are endeavouring to bring over into our land the old and accursed Wiclifian heresy, and along with it the Lutheran heresy, foster-daughter of Wiclif's.' For Tunstal, the real dangers that these heresies – heresies which he explicitly represents as both Lollard and Lutheran – presented to England were as much to do with their form as their content, as his licence to More evinces:

By translating into our mother tongue some of the vilest of their booklets and printing them in great numbers, they are forsooth striving with all their might to stain and infect this country with these most pestilent doctrines – doctrines opposed to the truth of the Catholic Faith.

The best defence against this infection, then, would be for 'learned men' to confound heretical texts, and this they might no better do than by causing 'the truth contained in the universal language' of Latin to be 'in like fashion [i.e. English] printed and set forth.' This, Tunstal suggested, would mean that 'it will come to pass that men unskilled in sacred lore, having in hands these new heretical books, and along with them catholic books refuting the same' would be able 'to discern the truth for themselves.' Moreover, Tunstal's consideration here was not simply those without Latin or scriptural expertise, but also that More should busy himself about 'putting forth some writings in English which will reveal to the simple and uneducated the crafty

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<sup>329</sup> See *Acts and Monuments*, IV, pp. 667-70.

malice of the heretics, and render such folk better equipped against such impious supplanters of the Church.<sup>330</sup> Some caution must, as before, be exercised in assessing precisely who Tunstal means when he writes of ‘simple and uneducated’ men (*‘simplicibus et ideotis hominibus’*),<sup>331</sup> but whilst it might be seen as a little too convenient for the purposes of my argument to render it, after Peter Ackroyd, who suggests that it ‘can roughly be translated as ‘the man in the street,’ it seems reasonable to follow the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* in its translation of *ideota* as ‘ordinary individual, common man, esp. layman.’<sup>332</sup>

Tunstal’s hope that More might find time in his ‘leisure hours’, to perform such a task (‘if you can steal any from your duties’) was extravagantly realised. Indeed, as Brian Cummings suggests, More’s contribution to the campaign was ‘staggering’: ‘From 1529 to 1532 he was Henry’s lord chancellor; and yet between Tunstal’s commission and his own imprisonment by Henry in April 1534 he contributed one million words of polemic, all in the vernacular (some of it very much so).’<sup>333</sup> And whilst the subjects of Tunstal’s licence were Lutheran heresies in general, the popularity of Tyndale’s New Testament, compounded by the publication of his first two works of doctrinal exposition, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* and *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, in May and October 1528 respectively, meant that it was all but inevitable that Tyndale and his theology would, along with Luther himself, become the target of some of More’s most sustained rhetorical assaults. Tyndale and his fellow-travellers were little less prolific, nor prolix in their responses, with the resultant exchange of printed accusation and counter-accusation, rejection and rebuttal producing a sequence of disputatious works which has

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<sup>330</sup> Sturge, *Tunstal*, pp. 362-63.

<sup>331</sup> *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. by Elizabeth Frances Rogers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), no. 160, p. 387.

<sup>332</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998), p. 273; *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, prep. by R. E. Latham and D. R. Howlett, with the assist. of J. Blundell, S. J. O’Connor, A. H. Powell, R. Sharpe, P. R. Staniforth and C. White (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). The *Dictionary* offers the example of at least one reading in which *ideota* can refer to ‘one who speaks only his native vernacular.’

<sup>333</sup> *Literary Culture*, p. 192.

done much to shape the subsequent understanding of the debates at the heart of the early English reformation.

Given the evidence of the examinations of 1528, it is tempting to suggest that Tyndale's New Testament and his subsequent works of doctrinal exposition, *The Obedience of a Christian Man* and *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, held particular appeal for readers and listeners from the lower economic and educational strata of English society, especially in London and the South East. Despite the earlier caveats concerning the perils of their seemingly-straightforward social classification, the majority of those who appeared before Tunstal and his representatives *were* – whilst not, perhaps, ploughmen – tradespeople, craftsmen, and servants. Those from without this admittedly somewhat indistinct grouping who came under investigation, people like the curates of Kensington and Steeple Bumpstead, seem likely to have drawn the attention of the ecclesiastical authorities because of their contacts with this group: they were suspected of supplying them with heretical texts, or they had been, or were at risk of being, converted to their cause. But what this evidence suggests, I would argue, is rather less about the scriptural appetites of popular Bible-readers, and rather more about the English authorities' attitudes towards popular Bible-reading. The clarity and relative simplicity of Tyndale's translation, and, obviously, the fact that it was not necessary to have Latin to read or understand it, would no doubt have made it an object of desire to a Lollard community hungry for vernacular Scripture, and the contacts that those from amongst the group involved in textile and related trades would have made amongst London-based merchants from the low countries no doubt simplified the process of obtaining smuggled copies.

However, the question remains to be answered: why did this one, small, geographically-diffuse group gain so much attention? This was not, as Craig D'Alton's manuscript research has

demonstrated, simply a matter of Foxe's Protestant selectivity with the surviving materials.<sup>334</sup> Nor can it wholly be explained as happy – or unhappy – accident, with John Hacker's detection and abjuration chancing to reveal an otherwise unknown Lollard cell being drawn towards Luther; many amongst the community, as their depositions demonstrate, had long-standing heterodox beliefs, and several had made previous abjurations, long before the appearance of Tyndale's Testament. Rather, the principal concern of the English authorities was that Tyndale's New Testament made Scripture available not simply to be read by anyone, but to be interpreted by anyone. The trials of 1528 do not, after all, demonstrate that those of lower-class or of Lollard sympathies were more likely to own Tyndale's or other heretical texts than any other social group; they tell us rather that ownership of such books amongst this sort of community was of the greatest interest to the authorities, and was likely to attract their most exacting attentions. The perceived danger came not from lay Bible-ownership, although it might be a consequence of that, but from lay exegesis. The apparent paradox of the implacable opposition to English Bibles, and Tyndale's in particular, amongst men who were not just intellectually committed to, but had in some cases actually been involved in assisting in the production of the New Testament translation by 'our friend Erasmus', as More describes him in a letter to Tunstal of November 1516, begins to make more sense when we realise that their aim was not to prohibit Bibles, but to ensure that questions of biblical interpretation remained within the supervision of the church.<sup>335</sup> It is heterodoxy, rather than vernacular bibles, to which More and Tunstal are opposed, but vernacular bibles, unauthorised and spreading beyond the church's oversight, offer the opportunity for heterodox opinion to develop.

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<sup>334</sup> 'Cuthbert Tunstal and Heresy'.

<sup>335</sup> *St. Thomas More: Selected Letters*, ed. by Elizabeth Rogers (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 82.

In this aspect, Tyndale and his opponents are rather closer than they might at first appear. The locus of anxiety for both sides of the debate is the common reader, the uneducated reader, the mean, or simple reader. Tyndale, for all his faith in *sola scriptura*, accepts, as the epilogue to the Worms New Testament demonstrates, that his translation is not of sufficient authority that the less- or uneducated reader will be able to interpret it correctly unaided. Without assistance from an extra-scriptural source, whether that be the learned Christian or an explanatory ‘table’, they risk coming to a ‘wrong’ reading. This is an anxiety which the English episcopate shares, and one which we will see directly addressed by Thomas More. However, their solution is to restrict the Bible to the learned Christian, and the simplest means of achieving that, is to restrict it to those with Latin.

The necessity of justifying this apparent double-standard becomes clear in the first of More’s works written in response to Tunstal’s anti-heresy commission, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529). In the chapter closing its third book, the ‘Messenger’ who serves as foil to More’s persona within the text, ‘reherseth some causys whyche he hath herd layd by some of the clergye / wherefore the scrypture sholde not be suffred in englyshe.’ More’s response will be, he says, to show ‘his mynde that it were conuenient to haue the byble in englyshe.’ Whether that is what More goes on to do is, at best, debatable, but it is within his answer that More gives fullest expression to what it is in the possibility of unmediated, universal access to the Bible in English that causes such anxiety. Moreover, in 1531 Tyndale responded to the arguments that More presents in his *Dialogue* point-by-point and chapter-by-chapter in *An Answer vnto Thomas Mores Dialogue*, a work in which Tyndale seems to adopt the role of a vastly more critical version of More’s Messenger. That Tyndale chooses to deflect rather than to debunk More’s position on

lay Bible misinterpretation reminds us, as did his epilogue to his Worms New Testament, that the subject is no more uncomplicated for him than it is for More.

The Messenger opens the chapter by asking ‘why the clergie sholde kepe ye byble out of ley mennes handes / yat can no more but theyr mother tongue’? They do not, is More’s response:

they kepe none from them but such translacyon as be eyther not yet approued for good / or suche as be all redy reproued for nought / as Wyclyffes was and Tyndals. For as the other olde ones / that were before Wyclyffes dayes remayne lawfull / and be in some folkes handes had and red.<sup>336</sup>

Why then, the messenger asks, if so many want an English Bible, do so few have it? That, More responds, is the fault of the ‘secte of heretykes’ like Tyndale. They club together to fund the printing of their ‘euyll made or euyll translated’ books, and whilst many copies will be discovered and burned, a few will be sold, and thus each of these heretics risks the loss of only a part of their investment. No printer, by contrast More adds, will ‘lyghtly be so hote to put any byble in prynt at his owne charge / wherof the losse sholde lye hole in his owne necke / and than hange vpon a doubtfull tryall’ to establish whether his edition predated Wycliffe’s.<sup>337</sup> More’s propinquitous positioning of ‘necke’ and ‘hange’ suggest that the potential printer would risk everything: livelihood and life itself. This Tyndale gives short shrift in a direct response: if uncertainty over which Bibles might be approved is holding printers back from reproducing them, Tyndale argues, then why do the bishops not tell them which they might use, or better still, produce their own, new translation?<sup>338</sup>

The Messenger continues by asking why the clergy should object to vernacular Bibles. Their objection, More counters, whilst it is not one that he shares, is nonetheless understandable, since the clergy ‘se somtyme moche of ye worse sorte more feruent in ye calling for it / than

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<sup>336</sup> *Complete Works of More*, 6, i, p. 331.

<sup>337</sup> *Complete Works of More*, 6, i, p. 331.

<sup>338</sup> William Tyndale, *An Answer vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, ed. by Anne M. O’Donnell and Jared Wicks (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), pp. 169.

them we fynde far better.’ Naturally, therefore, the clergy ‘fere suche men desyre it for no good / and lest if it were in euery mannes hande / there wold grete parell aryse / & that sedycious people sholde do more harme therwith / than good and honest folke sholde take fruyte therby.’<sup>339</sup>

Ignoring the fact that More declares himself opposed to this perspective, Tyndale responds by pointing out that, by that logic, the very act of wanting a vernacular Bible would mark one out as a heretic.<sup>340</sup>

It is here that the Messenger addresses the question of lay Bible-interpretation, rather than simply the matter of ownership:

of all thynges specyally they say that scrypture is ye fode of the soule. And that the comen people be as infantys that must be fedde but with mylk and pappe. And yf we haue any stronger mete it must be chammed afore by the nurse and so put into the babys mouth. But me thynke though they make vs all infantys / they shall fynde many a shrewde brayne among vs / that can perceyue chalke fro chese well ynough and yf they wolde ones take vs our mete in our owne hande. We be not so euylly tothed but that within a whyle they shall se vs cham it our selfe as well as they.

In this, then More appears to be voicing, through the Messenger, a relatively robust defence of vernacular Scripture. However, in allowing the Messenger to claim that ‘they shall fynde many a shrewde brayne among vs’, that there will be many amongst the laity eminently capable of biblical interpretation, More simultaneously allows the Messenger to infer the presence of those who will not. This, More’s character responds, in precisely what puts ‘good folke in fere’ of an English Bible: ‘Not for the redyng & receyuyng / but for the bysy chammynge therof / & for moche medlynge with suche partys therof as lest wyll agre wyth theyr capacitytes.’ It is not their reading of the Bible that is objectionable, but their chewing upon it:

inordynate is ye appetyte whan men vnlearned though they rede it in theyr langage / wyll be bysy to enserch and dyspute the grete secrete mysteryes of scrypture / whiche thoughe they here they be not able to perceyue.

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<sup>339</sup> *Complete Works of More*, 6, i, p. 332.

<sup>340</sup> *An Answer*, p. 169.



This is the problem with making the Bible available in the vernacular: even where it is at its most opaque, readers, their capacity for correct interpretation notwithstanding, will seek to make their own readings, and those readings will, in many cases, be wrong.

Furthermore, More continues, not only have the Church Fathers, Gregory and Jerome sought to limit biblical interpretation by arguing that it ‘is playnly forboden vs that be not appoynted nor instructed therto’, but Paul himself provides a construction of the Church with a clear division of roles:

And surely syth as the holy appostle saynt Poule in dyuers of his epystles sayth / god hath by his holy spyryte so instytute & ordeyned his chyrch / yat he wyl haue some reders and some herers / som techers & som lerners / we do playnly peruerte & tourne vp so downe ye ryght order of Crystes chyrch / whan ye one parte medleth with ye others offyce.<sup>341</sup>

This scriptural justification Tyndale finds difficult to answer, and thus he questions More’s right to engage in scriptural interpretation at all: ‘It is’, Tyndale asserts, ‘impossyble to vnderstond ether peter or paul or ought at al in the scripture / for him that denieth the iustifienge of faith in christes bloude’; if More will not accept justification by faith alone, then he is disqualified from commenting at all. That Tyndale has slipped here from rebuttal of the argument to a general and personal attack upon More himself is underlined by his closing comment: ‘I feare me that you are voyde and empte with all youre spiritualitie / whose defender ye haue taken vppon you to be / for to mocke out the trouth for lucre and vauntage.’<sup>342</sup> Tyndale, at this point, is unable to engage with the substance of More’s argument directly, and the reason that he is unable to do so is because he has already committed himself, in print, to an acknowledgement of its truth: there are some amongst less learned readers for whom the Word of God (or, at least, his translation of it) will not be enough.

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<sup>341</sup> *Complete Works of More*, 6, i, pp. 332-3.

<sup>342</sup> *An Answer*, p. 170.

More is, I suggest, well-aware that in the position of the reformists, and of Tyndale in particular, there is a certain degree of equivocacy when it comes to the least-learned being enabled to embark upon their own, independent readings of the Bible. With this in mind, therefore, More returns to the ‘chammyng’ of the Bible by the ‘comen people’ in a lengthy exposition which seeks to suggest that they are, in fact, congenitally predisposed towards the worst of all readings, and to reassert the connection between popular Bible-reading and popular civil disorder. Invoking Plato, More suggests that ‘the grete phylosopher’ forbade all but those who were qualified from meddling with civil law, since ‘they that can not very well attayne to perceyue them / begynne to mysse lyke / dysprase / and contempne theym’; that which they do not understand, in other words, they will begin to openly challenge. From this, More continues, ‘foloweth the breche of the lawes and dysordre of the people’ because ‘commenly the beste lawes shall worste lyke moche of the comen people / whych moost longe (yf they myghte be herde and followed) to lyue all at lyberte vnder none at all.’<sup>343</sup> This same imperative, More argues, would drive the commonalty to challenge spiritual law no less than temporal.

More continues by expanding on this ‘chammyng’ upon the Bible, and here his portrayal of a scene of popular Bible-interpretation seeks to capitalise upon Tyndale’s unease once more. Where Tyndale admitted that a less-learned reader would need a theologically-knowledgeable scriptural guide, More constructs a scenario in which that guidance is provided by one rather less capable, one who ‘boldely wyll vpon the fyrst redyng bycause he knoweth the wordys / take vpon hym therfore to teche other men the sentence.’ Rather than bringing enlightenment, More argues, this reader will bring ‘parell of his owne soule and other mennys to / by the bryngynge men into madde wayes / sectys / and heresyas / suche as heretyques haue of olde brought vp and chyrche hath contempned.’ More invokes his own version of the Lollard reading-group, where,

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<sup>343</sup> *Complete Works of More*, 6, i, pp. 334-5.

he suggests, there is a real likelihood – even an inevitability – that the way in which the commonalty read will lead them to damnation. The bolder amongst them will mistake their own literacy for erudition, and will believe that, because they can make out the meaning of the individual words of the Bible, they have understood the Word of God. In this, I suggest, More is engaged in reimagining Tyndale’s hoped-for scene of collective Bible-study: where Tyndale called upon the learned to edify the wider congregation, More presents a tableau of chaotic mutual ignorance. ‘Yf’, More states, ‘the comen people myght be bolde to cham it as ye say and to dyspute it’:

than sholde ye haue the more blynde ye more bolde / the more ignoraunt the more besy / the lesse wyt the more inquysytyfe / the more fole the more talkatyfe of great doutys and hygh questyons of holy scripture and of goddes great and secrete mysteryes / and thys not sobrelly of any good affeccyon / but presumptuously and vnreuerently at mete and at mele. And there whan the wyne were in and the wytte out / wolde they take vppon them with folyshe wordys and blasphemye to handle holy scripture in more homely maner than a songe of Robyn hode.<sup>344</sup>

More’s objection here, then, is to argue that a universally-available and universally-read vernacular Bible will turn exegesis into bar-room banter, and that, simply because, at the most basic level, someone can read, then they will believe themselves capable of untangling the thorniest issues of scriptural interpretation, even those that ‘the wyseste and the best lerned / and he that therein hath by many yeres bestowed his hole mynde / is yet vnable to do.’ More is, in other words, making a distinction between sorts of readers and sorts of reading, and arguing that it is the way that the common people read which renders unmediated Scripture unsuitable for them. They will, he suggests, ‘solemply take vpon them lyke as they were ordynary reders to interprete the texte at theyr pleasure’, but they are not ordinaries, they lack the education and

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<sup>344</sup> *Complete Works of More*, 6, i, p. 335.

understanding that would enable them to read as ordinaries would, and thus the only result will be that ‘the scrypture of god shold lese his honoure and reuerence’.<sup>345</sup>

In More’s construction, the common people, when they can read, do so in a particular way; their approach to a text, he argues, is completely different to that of the learned reader, and, since that manner of reading is, in More’s projection, entirely unsuitable for the solemn and intellectually-demanding process of scriptural interpretation, then those common people cannot be allowed to apply it to Tyndale’s New Testament. That manner of reading is, moreover, one that, as we have seen, concerns Tyndale no less than it does his opponents; whilst each side offers very different solutions to the problems that this sort of reading will bring, the focus of their anxiety is the same: that popularising Bible-reading may lead to popular Bible-*mis*readings. But to understand this perception that common readers will make erroneous readings, we need to understand how their reading is constructed. If we return to More, we see that he suggests that they will read irreverantly, presumptuously, even ignorantly and drunkenly, but the clearest indicator of his formation of the uneducated reader’s manner of reading is, I would argue, contained within his suggestion that they will ‘handle holy scrypture in more homely maner than a songe of Robyn hode.’ They will, More is arguing, treat the Bible in the same manner as a fable or romance, as an entertaining but spiritually-empty diversion. Moreover, More’s decision to cite Robin Hood specifically is not, I suggest, arbitrary. In choosing the particular example of tales of the outlaw hero, More is invoking a series of associations: with revelry and ribaldry, with disorder and criminality, with the temporal, with the popular, with the base, and, no doubt, with the proverbial suggestion that ‘tales of Robin Hood are good for fools.’<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> *Complete Works of More*, 6, i, p. 335.

<sup>346</sup> R. B. Dobson & J. Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 288.

However, More is by no means alone in attempting to make this specific connection. In fact, songs and stories of Robin Hood are frequently invoked by the reformers as exemplifying the sorts of texts that the Church will allow lay-folks to read whilst denying them the Bible, and by their opponents, who tend to suggest, as More does, that the uneducated will read the Bible as though it were a tale of Robin Hood. Famously, Tyndale includes just such a construction in *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, where, in his prologue ‘William Tyndale other wise called William Hychins to the Reader’, he defends his New Testament with a humanistic return *ad fontes*, finding biblical authority for vernacular scriptural publications:

Saith the cxviii / Psalme happy are they which serch ye testimonies of the lorde. But how shall I that doo when ye will not let me have his testimonies or wittenesses in a tonge which I vnderstonde? Will ye resist god Will ye forbidde hym to geve his spirite vnto the laye as well as vnto you?

For Tyndale, the argument that resistance to English translations of the Bible is motivated by concern for the laity’s spiritual health is given the lie by contrast with that which is allowed:

that this thretenynge and forbiddynge the laye people to read the scripture is not for love of youre soules (which they care for as ye foxe doeth for ye gysse) is evidente & clerer then the sonne / in as moch as they permitte & sofre you to reade \* Robyn hode & bevis of hampton / hercules & fables of loue & wantones & of rybaudry as fylthy as herte can thinke / to corrupt ye myndes of youth with all.

This sort of reading material, Tyndale continues, is ‘clene contrary to the doctrine of christ & of his apostles’, and in particular the fifth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, which, as Tyndale translates it, ‘sayeth: se that fornicacion and all vnclenes or covetousnes be not once named amonge you / as it becometh sayntes: nether fylthines / nether folysh talkynge / nor gestinge which are not comly.’ For Tyndale, then, the logic is inescapable: ‘Now seinge they permitte you frely to reade those thinges which corrupte youre mindes & robbe you of ye kyngdome of god & christe & brynge ye wrath of god apou you how is this forbyddinge for love of youre soules?’ Tyndale provides a withering summary of his argument in the accompanying

marginal note. Assuming the voice of his enemies, he figures their philosophy as, in my reading, analogous to the ‘do what thou wilt’ of Rabelais’s Thelemites, mimicking their attitude as a disdainful ‘Reade what thou wilt: ye and saye what thou wilt save the trueth.’<sup>347</sup>

It is immediately apparent here that Tyndale is, in one sense, simply invoking the sort of criticism of secular popular stories made by Vives in *The Instruction of a Christen Woman* – that they are lascivious, dishonest, disreputable, and that they serve only to corrupt the minds and souls of the vulnerable – and using the fact that such stories are permitted by the religious authorities to emphasize the hypocrisy of a Church which simultaneously denies its congregation access to the Word. Tyndale’s denunciation here has produced frequent comment: For R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, Tyndale’s ‘blanket condemnation’ of a church which allows the laity access to frivolous fictions but not the Bible may be viewed as a particularly virulent strain of ‘clerical censure [...] best interpreted as a late manifestation of a long tradition, dating back to at least Saints Jerome and Gregory the Great, of Christian reprobation of secular and unholy stories.’<sup>348</sup> For Alex Davis, Tyndale’s strategy here is a ‘calculated affront’, the deliberate creation of an association between his enemies and the least valuable of vernacular literature, that which they ‘would have had the least time for – but which they were not prepared to prohibit.’ By simply contrasting permissible deceit with forbidden Truth, Davis argues, ‘Tyndale condemns those powerful men who willingly let the people indulge themselves with frivolous and lying fictions whilst starving them of proper reading, all the while claiming that they are acting in everybody’s best interests.’<sup>349</sup> The modern editors of Thomas More’s *A Dialogue*

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<sup>347</sup> William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1970) (facsimile edition of *The Obedience of a Christen Man* (Antwerp: Martin de Keyser, 1528) (STC 24446)), sigs C3v-C4r; François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. by Sir Thomas Urquhart and Pierre Le Motteux (New York: Alfred. A Knopf, 1994) , p. 157;

<sup>348</sup> *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, p. 3.

<sup>349</sup> Davis, *Chivalry and Romance*, pp. 8- 9.

*Concerning Heresies*, in decribing the Lord Chancellor's own references to Robin Hood, suggest a similar motivation, arguing that 'Tyndale also used the ballad in much the same way More did, as something light, not to be taken seriously [...] Tyndale blamed the clergy for permitting frivolous tales like Robin Hood to be published while forbidding the scriptures in the language of the people'.<sup>350</sup>

However, it is also possible that Tyndale had a particular reason for invoking Robin Hood specifically here. The accusation that his tales might be being read or heard in preference to religion was a long-standing one; in fact, the earliest extant literary reference to tales of Robin Hood represents their appeal in precisely this way: In William Langland's 1377 B-text of *Piers Plowman*, 'Sloth', the personification of idle priesthood confesses that:

I can noght parfittly my Paternoster as the preest it syngeth,  
But I kan rymes of Robyn hood and Randolf Erl of Chestre,  
Ac neither of oure lord ne of oure lady the leeste that euere was maked. (ll. 394-6)<sup>351</sup>

More often, however, it is the laity who are reproved for choosing tales of Robin Hood over more spiritually weighty matters. The early fifteenth-century religious text *Diues and Pauper*, for example, rails against those who would 'leuir go to the tauerne than to holy church. Leuyr to here a songe of Robynhode. Or of some rybaudry thanne to here messe or matyns or any other of goddes seruyce',<sup>352</sup> whilst an edition of John Mirk's *Festial* printed by Theodoric Rood and Thomas Hunte in 1486 suggests that 'many had leuer to here a songe of robynhode or tale of rebaudry where for goddis worde shall not be prechith to soche'.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> More, *Complete Works*, 6, p. 696.

<sup>351</sup> William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The B Version*, ed. by George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (London: Athlone Press, 1975), p. 331

<sup>352</sup> Thomas H. Ohlgren, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), p. 50.

<sup>353</sup> John Mirk, *Festial* (Oxford: Theodoric Rood and Thomas Hunt, 1486) (STC17958), sig. e3v. Interestingly, this reference to Robin Hood is not present in any of the numerous manuscript editions of the *Festial*, so it may be an addition by Rood and Hunte (I am indebted to Professor Susan Powell, editor of the forthcoming *Critical Edition of John Mirk's Festial* for the Early English Text Society for this information).

Tyndale may, then, simply be invoking ‘Robin Hood’ as a generic descriptor of worthless, and specifically irreligious texts, but listing with him tales of ‘bevis of hampton’ makes this construction very similar to one found in a specifically Lollard manuscript, Cambridge University Library ii.vi.26., the incipit of which tale reads, ‘A dialogue [a]s hi[t] were of a wyse man and of a fole denyi[n]ge the trwethe with fablis.’<sup>354</sup> This dialogue, as Margaret Deansley notes, ‘seems to be rather between a faint hearted Lollard, most unwilling to “lose his goods” and adopt the Puritan strictness of the Lollards, and one of sterner mettle, who complains of his faintheartedness and finally converts him.’<sup>355</sup> And that which the fool wants is ‘a mery tale of Giy of Wariwyk, Beufiz of Hamton, either of Sire Lebewz, Robyn Hod, either of summe welfarynge man’.<sup>356</sup> It would, of course, be far too speculative to suggest that Tyndale was familiar with this manuscript, or even this tale, but it does argue that the formula which both employ represents the reading of tales of Robin or Bevis as the execrable alternative not just to good Christian conduct, or even to listening to sermons, but to the reading of Scripture.

One other possible justification for Tyndale’s invocation might, however, be conjectured at, the evidence for which comes from Robert Barnes *A supplicatyon [...] vnto the most excellent and redoubted prince kinge henrye the eyght*.<sup>357</sup> Barnes, born c. 1495 had entered the house of the Austin friars in Cambridge during childhood and had, as a young man, travelled to Louvaine where he had studied under Erasmus, ‘developing as a result’, Douglas Parker suggests, ‘an interest in and sympathy for humanist views’.<sup>358</sup> Barnes returned to Cambridge as Prior around

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<sup>354</sup> Quoted in Andrew Cole, ‘William Langland’s Lollardy’, *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 17 (2003), 25-54 (p. 30, fn. 12).

<sup>355</sup> Margaret Deansley, *The Lollard Bible and other Medieval Biblical Versions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920, repr. 1966), p. 274.

<sup>356</sup> Quoted in Ralph Hanna, *London Literature 1300-1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 151.

<sup>357</sup> Robert Barnes, *A supplicatyon made by Robert Barnes doctoure in diuinitie, vnto the most excellent and redoubted prince kinge henrye the eyght* (Antwerp: M. de Keyser / S. Cock, 1531) (STC 1470).

<sup>358</sup> Robert Barnes, *A critical edition of Robert Barnes’s A Supplication unto the most gracyous prince Kynge Henry the VIII, 1534*, ed. by Douglas Parker (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 3.



1521, and it was there, on Christmas Eve 1525 that he preached a sermon which, it seems, attacked clerical corruption in general, and Wolsey in particular. Following Barnes's examination and appearance before Wolsey, he spent some time in the Fleet prison, before being released into the custody of the Austin Friary in London, where, as Parker continues:

now apparently more committed to reformist views than ever and clearly not having learned his lesson, Barnes, somewhat recklessly one feels, used the London Friary as a centre for distributing copies of William Tyndale's English New Testament.<sup>359</sup>

Once these activities came to the attention of Tunstall, Barnes was moved to the Austin House in Northampton, from where he staged a daring escape: leaving a suicide-note for Wolsey and some clothes upon a riverbank, Barnes fled to London in disguise, before sailing on to Antwerp and then making his way to Wittenberg.

From Antwerp, Barnes produced his *Supplication*, an apology which attempted to justify his position and conduct, and within it he asks an intriguing question:

was it not a holy counselle of the chanseler of london to conselle a sertyn merchaunt to by Robyn hoo de for his seruantes to rede? what shulde they do with vitas patrum and with bokes of holy scripture? Also the same Chanseler sayed to an other man what fyndest thou in the gospel but a story? what good canst thou take there out?<sup>360</sup>

Barnes may, of course, be speaking figuratively of Thomas More's conduct here, but the possibility exists that he is talking of actual events: that More was known to have recommended Robin Hood over the Bible as suitable reading matter for a servant. Whether or not the story was true, it seems likely that it was in circulation amongst the reformist community in Antwerp, from whence both Tyndale and Barnes may have picked it up. If that was the case, then Tyndale's reference to Robin Hood is a rather more pointed and directed jibe than it has hitherto been assumed to be.

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<sup>359</sup> A critical edition of Robert Barnes's *A Supplication*, p. 5.

<sup>360</sup> A critical edition of Robert Barnes's *A Supplication*, p. 615

As I hope this chapter has demonstrated, as the promise of lay access to vernacular scripture implicit in Erasmus's exhortations was fulfilled by Tyndale's translation of his New Testament, both reformers and conservatives began to be exercised by the troubling matter of lay interpretation. Where Erasmus and Vives could speculate about their ideal model readerships, both More and Tyndale were obliged to respond to the prospect of real readerships, and what they might do with the Bibles that were now available to them. However, both More's commonalty busily 'chammyng' and Tyndale's weak-stomached readers in need of learned assistance are no less models of their authors' construction than Vives's and Erasmus's. They are not, by contrast, their ideal, but they remain an amorphous, unindividualized commons. Both More and Tyndale worry about how that indistinct constituency might read, and offer solutions which, perhaps surprisingly, are not as different as we might expect. More, after all, does not propose that lay access to the Bible should be permanently prohibited, but rather that great care should be taken to ensure that when, at some unspecified future date, they are provided with vernacular Scripture, it is in a translation so carefully undertaken, so fixed in single meaning, that they will be unable to misinterpret it. Tyndale's solution is external to the text itself: the commonalty will need guidance, whether from a 'table', or from the learned individuals who might assist them. However, in the final chapter, I want to address the work of two reformers, William Roye and Jerome Barlowe, who adopt a rather different policy, and tailor their polemical and doctrinal messages to suit what they imagine are the actual proclivities of that same constituency of common readers.

## Chapter 5: Reformed Writers and Mean Readers

In 1527 and 1528, the Strasbourg printer Johann Schott published two works by English exiles: *A Brefe Dialogue bitwene a Christen Father and his stobborne Sonne*, by William Roye, and *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*, anonymously published, but generally agreed to be the work of Roye and Jerome Barlowe. William Roye was the one-time friar of the Observant Franciscan convent at Greenwich who was, as has already been noted, the translator responsible for the first English edition of Erasmus's *Paraclesis* in print, and had assisted Tyndale with the preparation of his New Testaments in both Cologne and Worms. The relationship between Tyndale and Roye was not, it seems, entirely harmonious: where Anthea Hume alludes to the fact that there had 'apparently been some friction between them', her diplomatic description is fleshed out rather more forcefully in the prefatory letter 'William Tyndale otherwise called hychins to the reader', which forms the prologue to his 1528 *Parable of the Wicked Mammon*.<sup>361</sup> In this, Tyndale describes Roye as 'a man somewhat craftye when he cometh vnto new accoyntaunce and before he be thorow knowen', who only offered his help because he was penniless. 'As longe as he had no money', Tyndale laments, 'somewhat I could ruele him. but as sone as had gotten him money / he became lyke him selfe.' When Roye was being 'him selfe', Tyndale elaborates, he was 'one whos tonge is able not only to make foles sterke madde / but also to disceave the wisest that is at the fyrst sight and accoyntaunce.'<sup>362</sup>

By 1527, Tyndale and Roye had parted company, with Roye heading to Strasbourg. There he was joined by Jerome Barlowe, a fellow lapsed Greenwich-Franciscan, who, like Roye,

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<sup>361</sup> William Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (Antwerp: Martin de Keyser, 1528) (STC 24454).

<sup>362</sup> Anthea Hume, 'William Roye's "Breffe Dialogue" (1527): an English version of a Strassburg catechism', *Harvard Theological Review*, 60 (1967), 307-21 (p. 307); *A Critical Edition of William Tyndale's 'The Parable of the Wicked Mammon'*, ed. by John Dick (Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms International, 1974), pp. 1-3. Subsequent references to *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* are to this edition.

reached Strasbourg via Worms.<sup>363</sup> In Worms, Tyndale claims, ‘which Ierom wyth all diligence I warned of Royes boldnesse and exhorted him to bewarre of him and to walke quyetly and with pacience and long sofferinge.’ Although Barlowe initially promised Tyndale that he would follow his advice, it appears that once in Strasbourg, Roye’s loquacious ‘tonge’ soon persuaded Barlowe to ignore the admonishment, as Tyndale explains:

when he was comen to Argentine [Strasbourg] william Roye [...] gate him to him and sett him a werke to make rimes / while he himselfe translated a dialoge out of laten in to english / in whose prologe he promyseth moare a greate deall than I fere me he will ever paye.<sup>364</sup>

Roye and Barlowe’s efforts in Strasbourg resulted in the first two continentally-printed reformist works, in English, destined for England, in which Tyndale had not had a hand: Roye’s *A Breffe Dialogue bitwene a Christen Father and his stobborne Sonne*, and the collaborative *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe / For I say no Thyng but trothe*.<sup>365</sup>

In many respects, the two texts appear, and indeed are, very different productions: the first is a translation of a continental reformist catechism, whilst the second is a vituperative and frankly slanderous verse satire which wanders in the targets of its abuse between individual

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<sup>363</sup> Both Barlowe and Roye may have been amongst the friars who resisted Wolsey’s visitation upon the Observant convent in January 1525 and who, rather than submit, ‘departyd many of them unto other placys’ (*Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London*, ed. by J. G. Nichols (London: Camden Society, 1852), p. 31).

<sup>364</sup> *Parable*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>365</sup> William Roye, *A Breffe Dialogue bitwene a Christen Father and his stobborne Sonne* (Strasbourg: Johann Schott, 1527) (STC 24223.3); Jerome Barlowe and William Roye, *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe / For I say no Thyng but trothe* (Strasbourg: Johann Schott, 1528) (STC 1462.7). Subsequent references are to the most recent editions: William Roye, *A breffe dialogue bitwene a Christen father and his stobborne sonne: the first Protestant catechism published in english*, ed. by Douglas Parker and Bruce Krajewski (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1999) and Jerome Barlowe and William Roye, *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*, ed. by Douglas Parker (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1992). The precise nature of their collaboration in producing *Rede Me* is difficult to judge. Tyndale’s phrasing suggests that the work was done by Barlowe at Roye’s instigation, and that interpretation has been shared by, for example, Gordon Rupp (E. Gordon Rupp, *Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), p. 55) and Anthea Hume (A Study of the Writings of the English Protestant Exiles, 1523-35 (Excluding their Bible Translations) (University of London: unpublished PhD dissertation, 1961), p. 55). However, here, as with the use of the text’s opening line for its title, I follow the most recent editor of *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*, Douglas Parker, who suggests that, given that the available attributional evidence is inconclusive, ‘it is safer to think of the work as a collaborative effort without trying to apportion its ideas or various parts to one or other of the two people most often linked to it.’ (*Rede Me*, p. 33).

members of the Catholic hierarchy and its supporters in England and beyond, and of its religious communities and institutions more generally. However, my contention here is that, for their authors, both *Rede Me* and *A Brefe Dialoge* share a common purpose, in so far as that they are both aimed to inform and instruct a particular English readership and wider audience. In both texts, I hope to establish, Roye and Barlowe are writing for and appealing to those that they construct as the ‘common’, ‘mean’, or ‘simple’ people.

Roye’s *Brefe Dialoge* is, as Anthea Hume has established, a translation of a catechism written by the prominent Strasbourg reformer Wolfgang Capito. Capito’s catechism was printed twice in that city in 1527, first in Latin as *De Pueris Instituendis Ecclesias Argentinensis Isagoge*, shortly followed by a German version, *Kinder bericht vnd fragstruck von gemeynen puncten Christlichs glaubens*, printed by Wolfgang Köpfel.<sup>366</sup> Some significance has been attributed to Roye’s translation, both because, as Louis Schuster notes, ‘The *Brefe Dialoge*’s ninety pages of informal catechism represent the first attempt at a systematic exposition of reformed doctrine in the vernacular’, and because it is a text mentioned by name in several documents concerned with the proscription of heretical literature.<sup>367</sup> Its content and reception notwithstanding, the prefatory letter with which *A Brefe Dialoge* opens repays individual attention, since there Roye reveals the motivation for his current work, the audience for whom he is writing, and the effect that its reading will have upon them, provided that they read it in the

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<sup>366</sup> ‘William Roye’s “Brefe Dialoge”’, p. 308. Hume suggests that Capito, ‘known for unstable and near-radical views’, may have needed to submit the Latin version for the approval of his colleagues before the publication of the German version could be sanctioned (p. 309). On Capito’s Strasbourg career, see James M. Kittleson, *Wolfgang Capito: Humanist to Reformer* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 112-142. Capito’s Latin and German versions are reprinted in parallel columns in *Monumenta Germaniae Paedagogica*, vol. 22, ed. by K. Kehrbach (Berlin: Hofmann, 1900), pp. 100-92. The publication details of the German version are found in Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Bibliography of Strasbourg Imprints, 1480-1599* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 293.

<sup>367</sup> L. A. Schuster, ‘Thomas More’s Polemical Career, 1523-1533’, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, 8, iii, ed. by Louis A. Schuster, Richard C. Marius and James Lusardi (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 1135-1268 (p. 1172). Douglas Parker summarises the proscriptions against *A Brefe Dialoge* in the introduction to his edition (pp. 19-22).

way that he suggests. Moreover, Roye also uses his prefatory letter to reflect upon the New Testament translations in which he was involved, and the reaction that they provoked from the English episcopacy.

Where the Cologne and Worms New Testaments had been published anonymously, Roye proclaims his authorship of *A Breve Dialogue* from its opening address: Roye's prologue dedicates his translation, 'To the Right noble Estates/ and to all wother of the toun of Cales,' to whom, he continues, 'Wiliam Roye desyreth grace and peace/ from God the father/ and from the lorde Iesus Christ.' Roye follows this dedication by conducting an act of retrospective attribution upon the earlier New Testaments, announcing that:

It is not vnknowne to you all my lordes/ and masters/ and all wother my singuler gode frendes and brethren in Christ/ howe that this last yere/ the newe testament of oure saveour/ was delyvered vnto you/ through the faythfull and diligent stodye/ of one of oure nacion/ a man no doute/ ther vnto electe and chosen of God/ named William Hitchyns/ vnto whome I was (after the grace geven me of the lorde) as healpe felowe/ and parte taker of his laboures/ that every christen man/ myght therby heare and vnderstonde/ at home/ and in his owne housse/ the sprete of God speakynge therin/ and thorowe his holy apostels.<sup>368</sup>

Roye had not, in this, as Keith Brown suggests, 'let the cat out of the bag by identifying Tyndale as the translator of the New Testament, and himself as his helper', since, as we have seen from Tunstal's monition of October 1526, the English authorities were already well aware of Tyndale and Roye's activities.<sup>369</sup> Indeed, if the opening of Roye's prologue is taken at face-value, this was already common enough knowledge to have reached the ears of the great and the good of Calais and beyond.<sup>370</sup> However, although it is unlikely that Roye's prologue alone prompted any

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<sup>368</sup> *Breve dialogue*, p. 99.

<sup>369</sup> Keith Brown, 'Wolsey and ecclesiastical order: the case of the Fransiscan Observants', in *Cardinal Wolsey: Church, State and Art*, ed. by S. J. Gunn and P. G. Lindley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 219-238 (p. 233).

<sup>370</sup> Why Roye should have chosen the citizens of Calais as the subjects of his dedication is unclear. Some commentators have suggested that that was the town of his birth (see, for example, Rupp, *Studies in the Making*, p. 52, and A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: Batsford, 1964), p. 98), but offer no evidence for this beyond the fact of the dedication itself. Parker summarises these and other suggested places of origin for Roye in

alteration in focus of the English programme against heretics-in-exile, the ambiguity of his self-declared role as ‘healpe felowe/ and parte taker’ in the production of the earlier New Testaments may shed some light upon Tyndale’s preface to *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, and the fact that its focus is as much upon Roye, his character, works and claims, as it is upon the subject of the text itself.<sup>371</sup>

Tyndale declares that, as with his New Testaments, he would have been content to see *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* printed without authorial attribution, but that he was now ‘compelled’ to abandon that anonymity. He does not cite Roye’s preface as the specific source of this compulsion, but since he moves directly to a robustly critical assessment of his one-time assistant, it seems safe to assume that it is the cause. Tyndale feels it necessary both to admit his own responsibility for the New Testaments, and to clarify Roye’s role in their production. Having waited in vain for an unnamed ‘faythfull companyon’ to assist him with his translation, Tyndale announces, he accepted the help of Roye, whose company he ‘suffered’ only ‘till yat was ended which I coulde nor doo alone without one both to write & to helpe me to compare ye textes to gether.’<sup>372</sup> Tyndale is not, therefore, denying having received Roye’s support, but is rather seeking to precisely circumscribe the limits of that assistance: Roye acted as amenuensis, Tyndale admits, and even played some subsidiary role in the preparatory assessment of the translation’s source materials. What Roye is denied, in Tyndale’s assertion, is any responsibility for the text of the finished translation itself; that, Tyndale proclaims, is his and his alone. But Tyndale’s motives in establishing this distinction, in providing this precise delimitation of

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both *A Brefe Dialogue* (p. 12), and *Rede Me* (p. 29). More recently, David Daniell has suggested that Roye ‘was probably the son of Pety Roy, minor servant of Henry VII’ (David Daniell, ‘Roy, William (*d.* in or before 1531)’, *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 48, pp. 49-50 (p. 49).

<sup>371</sup> That being, that works are subsidiary to faith, which position Tyndale justifies through an exposition of the parable of Luke 16 subsequently known as that of the ‘Unjust Steward’.

<sup>372</sup> *Parable*, p. 2.

Roye's indeterminate 'healpe felowe/ and parte taker', are not, I would argue, simply the product of a desire to establish his own, sole, authorial primacy. Tyndale's preface is, clearly, a positive assertion of personal attribution, but that is adjunctive to its primary, repudiative purpose, which is to disassociate his New Testaments from Roye as a writer. To see why Tyndale felt this compulsion, we need to return to the texts produced by Roye and Barlowe in Strasbourg in 1527 and 1528.

Having opened *A Breve Dialogue*'s prefatory letter by addressing the production and reception of Tyndale's New Testaments, Roye turns to his current endeavour. He has, he states, 'allredy partly translated/ certayne bokes of the olde testament' and, promising that 'with the healpe of God' they will shortly be completed and published (the promise which Tyndale, in his prologue, doubts the fulfilment of) he has, in the interim, begun to consider the needs of a different audience:

in the meane season I castynge into my mynde the meane peoples capacite/ and the great supersticion/ whiche so longe hathe rayned and hadde vpperhonde/ thought it very necessary to make some smale treatous/ wherby somewhat they myght be the better prepared/ and taught howe to demeane theym selves/ in the profounde misteries and greate iudgementes of God/ conteyned in the olde testament/ and prophetes.

With these thoughts uppermost in his mind, Roye states, he fortun'd to chance upon 'a smale workce [...] a treatous very excellent', which, although he claims to have been ignorant of its authorship, was Capito's catechism. This, Roye continues, struck him as a text ideally suited to 'the meane peoples capacite', not least because it delivers its instruction 'so evidently (all papisticall sophistry and delusion set a syde) that even babes of seven yeare old playnly perceave thinges that a while agone men of greate age coulde nott apprehende.' Moreover, Roye notes, the appropriateness and efficaciousness of Capito's text was everywhere to be seen, for in



Strasbourg 'as I am (where this boke is comenly in use) bothe yonge and olde/ practise in lyvyng/ all those thinges whyche the boke teacheth by wrytyng.'<sup>373</sup>

Here, then, Roye is explaining his decision to choose a text suitable for the instruction of the 'meane people', and having established that *A Breve Dialogue* is an appropriate text with which to do so, he turns to a consideration of the way in which it should be read:

I also require and exhorte the commen people that they rede not this boke as they are wont to rede vayne storys or fables/ hastily rennyge there over. For when they shall end it/ more frute shall apere/ then the begynning semeth to pretende.

Roye is, it appears, still thinking about the 'capacite' of his intended readership: they need to be conscious of the fact that *A Breve Dialogue* must be read in a completely different way to that in which he suggests 'commen people' are accustomed to engage with texts. There is, of course, nothing new in his ascribing to that demographic an enthusiasm for 'vayne stories' and fables, but it is not simply the stories themselves with which Roye is here concerned, but with the way in which they are read: it is this 'hastly rennyge there over' of the text, Roye is arguing, that is the problem. Whilst invoking a commonplace criticism of what it is that these 'commen people' *choose* to read, Roye is simultaneously pronouncing upon the *way* that they read, but Roye is actually doing more here than criticising rash readers for their impetuosity. Rather, he is suggesting that reading for pleasure, and reading in order to be educated, are distinctly different processes, and that those coming to his treatise must abandon their old way of reading and learn a new. Moreover, if we ignore Roye's perjorative class distinction, it might be admitted that he does have something here, for in that 'hastly rennyge there over' he captures the experience of reading an enjoyable, though perhaps intellectually-undemanding tale: the compulsion to race towards the conclusion of what modern-day publishers' blurb would categorise as a 'page-turner'.

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<sup>373</sup> *Breve Dialogue*, p. 100.

Roye's concern, then, is that this is not the way to approach *A Breve Dialogue* if it is to have its desired effect. Rather, it must be read and reread, the lessons of its totality informing its readers understanding of its constituent parts. Roye's exhortation is, in short, not that the 'commen people' should simply read *A Breve Dialogue*, but that they should study it. And, since Roye's intended audience are unlikely to have been taught how to study, and even less likely to have encountered any texts beyond what he would adjudge nugatory, Roye proscribes precisely the pedagogic method by which that study should be undertaken, and the means by which the catechism will become domestically imprinted:

Doutles therfore it shulde be vnto the reders greate frute and proffyt/ yf at certayne howres there vnto appoynted/ they diligently did discusse somewhat by ordre therof/ and that among their owne housholde/ and singlerly wheare as yeuth is. and let it not be tedious vnto theym once or twise/ with prayer/ to repete that they have alrede redde.

Through this means, Roye adds, the teaching of *A Breve Dialogue* can be impressed upon both the literate and the illiterate catechumen, since 'good thynges ten tymes redde agayne please both the reder/ and the hearer also.'<sup>374</sup>

However, whilst Roye uses his preface to justify his choice of text, to establish it as singularly appropriate for an audience explicitly identified as the 'commen people', and to proscribe the methods by which those 'commen people' should come to an understanding of it, that, he understands, will count for little if they are prevented from reading it or hearing it read. With that consciousness, Roye interrupts the description of his proposed reading scheme with an appeal to those with the authority to prevent *A Breve Dialogue* from reaching its hoped-for destination. Just as Tyndale would, Roye finds it necessary to assert that his work will induce obedience, not rebellion in its readers: *A Breve Dialogue* will be, he argues 'the meanes wherof the lordes and ruelers of the realme/ shall perceave and fynde/ those to be meke and mylde/ and

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<sup>374</sup> *Breve Dialogue*, pp. 100-101.

to the temporall power obedient/ whom before as fearce lyons they feared.’<sup>375</sup> Like Tyndale, Roye adjudges it necessary to declare that his is not a work of demagoguery, and that rulers – temporal rulers at least – have nothing to fear from it. And for Roye, this assertion has to be made because, as he has already admitted, *A Breve Dialogue* is for the ‘commen people’, those who, in anti-heretical literature and legislation, are repeatedly alleged to have been stirred to sedition by reformist texts.

In its original versions, Capito’s *De Pueris Instituendis*, Anthea Hume explains, was to be used in the regular Sunday instruction of youth at Strasbourg’s three main churches which was instituted in 1526, and offered simple but comprehensive guidance in the reformed faith:

The work consists of questions put by the ‘Parens vel Praeceptor,’ and answers supplied by the ‘Filius,’ centring on the clauses of the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. The Creed provides opportunity for the exposition of justification by faith, the gift of the spirit, and good works, which the catechism argues reside in love towards one’s neighbour, not in confessions, pardons, pilgrimages, fasting and masses. Christian liberty means that a man is free in all external matters of ceremony, although he is bound in obedience to the laws of the common weal. Images should be put down by the Magistrate. The tract endorses the doctrine of predestination, and also that of psychosomnolence. The church is defined as the company of believers, living and dead, who outwardly use the Word of God, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. This church makes use of excommunication, by which members of the congregation avoid the company of the wicked; and its sacraments are signs of spiritual things. Baptism signifies the inner baptism of the conscience through Christ; but nevertheless infants are to be baptised, since, by the law of love, Christians must hope the best of each individual, and since Christ Himself blessed children. The Lord’s Supper strengthens the faith of believers, and testifies the unity of the congregation. Christ is not corporally present in the bread and wine, but He gives Himself to believers to be eaten spiritually. Remission of sins is obtained through faith, and not through the Pope’s pardons or the priest’s absolution. There is no purgatory.<sup>376</sup>

In this, aspect, therefore, Capito’s treatise provided precisely the doctrinal explication that Roye requires, and thus its straightforward rehearsal of the new creed requires little adaptation. However, this is not to suggest that Roye’s *A Breve Dialogue* is simply a verbatim translation of

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<sup>375</sup> *Breve Dialogue*, p. 101.

<sup>376</sup> ‘Roye’s “*Breve Dialogue*”’, pp. 309-10.

either of Capito's originals. Roye does, in fact, make significant revisions, revisions which both Hume and Parker suggest reflect the need to refashion *A Breffe Dialogue* for an English market, but which, I will argue, are indicative of the fact that Roye had a much more specific audience in mind whilst engaged in the treatise's reworking.<sup>377</sup>

The most important of the alterations which Roye makes is to reconfigure the didactic relationship between the dialogue's co-respondents. In Capito, the father closely questions the son upon the tenets of reformed Christian dogma, assessing the extent to which he has absorbed, understood and memorised them through the answers he receives. In Roye's reworking, it is now the son, innocently curious about, but unschooled in, the new faith, who questions the father. The father, in Roye's version, no longer interrogates the son to determine his canonical inculcation, but rather is represented as the model of a reformed individual believer, sharing with his son justifications, both scriptural and extra-scriptural, of his faith. For Hume, this alteration both 'gave the work an unexpected flavour in the context of the normal catechetical tradition', and 'reflected appropriately the situation in England, where the regular Protestant catechising of children was hardly a possibility, while the close questioning of a believing adult was a more probable formula.'<sup>378</sup> Both these assertions are, clearly, eminently plausible, but if we reflect upon this last in particular, in the context of the pedagogic method for the reading of *A Breffe Dialogue* that Roye proposes in his prefatory letter, we see that this was, in Roye's anticipation, an exact, rather than a probable formula.

Roye suggests of his intended audience, as we have seen, that *A Breffe Dialogue*, should be read, heard and discussed collectively, 'among their owne housholde/ and singlerly wheare as yeuth is.' In this, however, Roye envisages a particular role for the specific individual within

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<sup>377</sup> Roye's "*Breffe Dialogue*", pp. 310, 311; *Breffe Dialogue*, pp. 51-54.

<sup>378</sup> Roye's "*Breffe Dialogue*", p. 310.

each household who will be able to lead the process. Immediately after advancing the argument that *A Breve Dialogue* will induce obedience in its readers, Roye returns to the way in which it should be studied, suggesting that there are likely to be enlightened individuals amongst his intended audience of the ‘meane’ able to lead their fellows in this new learning: ‘God’, he states, ‘no doute hathe his electe amonge oure people also.’ These individual elect, Roye continues, will be unable not to transmit their new knowledge, because:

the worde of God cannot be ydle/ whose frute is greate/ and a sure perswasion of the kyndnes of God towards hit/ havyng in it silfe abundant charite/ wherewith above all wother thynges/ the commen well is knytt togedder.<sup>379</sup>

The relationship between the individual elect and the charity with which God’s word is replete is, in Roye’s construction, somewhat enigmatic, but, if I have interpreted him correctly, he is suggesting that it is this particular quality, this ‘silfe abundant charite’ which will ensure that from individual apprehension of God’s word will develop collective understanding and acceptance.

This is the model that Roye envisages for the transmission of *A Breve Dialogue*’s lessons, and it is the model which the dialogue itself demonstrates, as Roye makes plain:

For asmoche therfore as of all soche thynges the right enformacion commeth by commeninge/ this treatous is made in maner of a dyaloge bitwane twayne/ which speake together. That is to saye a goode christen man and his sonne/ whom he goeth aboute to enforme in the knowledge of Christ.<sup>380</sup>

The reason that Roye is driven to alter the relationship between the dialogue’s father and son, then, is not that, by doing so, he believes that *A Breve Dialogue* will more closely reflecting existing evangelical catechetical practice. Rather, Roye is offering an exemplary model of the way he envisages that catechetical process being undertaken, a model which he explicates in his preface. Those few who come to a ready understanding of the treatise’s message are thus the

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<sup>379</sup> *Breve Dialogue*, p. 101.

<sup>380</sup> *Breve Dialogue*, pp. 101-2.

‘Christen Father’, their wider household, family and friends are the ‘stobborne Sonne’. Therefore, Roye concludes his outline of a suggested pedagogic programme, and indeed his preface, by addressing these individual elect directly. They will, of course, have only the text itself to guide them, and thus they must prepare themselves spiritually before approaching it: ‘he that entendeth to socke here out eni swetnes’ must first ‘conceave in hym silfe the flammes of a christen herte/ whiche of their owne nature lighten and inflam there neghbour.’ Having approached *A Breffe Dialogue* with this spirit of Christian communion already kindled in their hearts, each will find ‘That when by redynge he is made ryche/ he shall also be gladde and able to healpe and sucker wother.’<sup>381</sup>

Roye undertakes his modification of the dynamic between Capito’s father and son because he has, as his preface demonstrates, a precise conception of both the community to whom his translation is directed, and of the ways in which they should read it. *A Breffe Dialogue* is written for small groups of ‘commen people’ of varying levels of reading competency. Some might be entirely illiterate, able to assimilate its doctrinal instruction only through hearing it read and discussing it; others, although able to read the dialogue, would nonetheless only be capable of its full understanding with the assistance of a final, select few amongst this community. These last would be Roye’s ‘electe’, fully-literate, but also able to come to a comprehension of *A Breffe Dialogue* individually, aided only by the necessary spirit of devout Christian fellowship. It is these individuals, having once reached that comprehension (since, as Roye asks, ‘Howe can a man warme a nother/ when he him silfe is frosen for cold?’) with whom the responsibility for the others’ enlightenment would lie.<sup>382</sup> This, then, is how and where Roye imagines his treatise being employed, but these cells of reformed readers and learners are, I would argue, neither

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<sup>381</sup> *Breffe Dialogue*, p. 102.

<sup>382</sup> *Breffe Dialogue*, p. 102.

imagined nor the product of Roye's wishful anticipation. The constituency for *A Breve Dialogue* that Roye here outlines is precisely analogous with those small communities of artisan and proletarian readers whose eagerness to avail themselves of Tyndale's New Testament, as we have seen from the evidence of John Tyball's confession, could bring them into contact with reformist friars, and who were last seen abjuring themselves before Tunstal. It is those small groups of 'known men' (and women), and the ways in which they read, hear read, share and discuss whatever fragments of vernacular scripture and theology they can acquire, that suggest to Roye the pedagogic paradigm that his preface expounds.

This is not to assert that *A Breve Dialogue* is a 'Lollard' tract, even were such a designation a straightforward one to make. My argument here is rather that Roye's understanding of the ways in which his translation might be read and understood by the 'commen people' to whom it is expressly directed is informed by Lollard practices, the very practices to which we have seen individuals tried as Lollards confessing. But Roye's treatise is also directed to the wider commonalty, and thus shows them, through the instruction of its preface and the example of its dialogue, how to read like Lollards, how, through study, memorisation, discussion, repetition and the influence of a few (divinely) inspired individuals amongst them, they can achieve the full apprehension of its lessons. Roye does sharpen the opprobriousness of Capito's original by the interpolation of material fiercely critical of the abuses of the religious, but whilst this bespeaks a shared enthusiasm for anticlerical complaint, to observe Roye espousing something closer to what we might term a 'Lollard theology', we will need to redirect our attention to focus upon *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*. However, Roye does make one seemingly minor alteration to the dialogue which serves to reposition the father, rewriting him as the representative of English heterodoxy. As the treatise nears its conclusion, the son asks the father how he occupies his free

time when not at prayer. ‘When I was of thyne age’ the father responds, ‘I went to scole / and with all diligence studied.’ Pressed on the subject of his study, the father responds: ‘Yt is gretly to be pondered what a manne begynneth in his youeth to learne / and that because he cannot lyghtly forgett it when he commeth to age. Wherefore I specially rede the newe testament in englishhe.’<sup>383</sup>

If, as I am suggesting, we can infer from the changes that Roye makes to Capito’s dialogue itself that he is carefully repositioning it for a specific audience, it is Roye’s preface that gives us the clearest statement of his intent: having worked with Tyndale in translating the New Testament, and alone on some of the Old, he has come to the realisation that the complexities of this latter in particular may prove too difficult for many. For them, therefore, he provides a work of simple question-and-answer instruction, a basic guide-book to the new doctrine, and one that he prefaces, albeit briefly, with specific instructions on how it is to be used. It is a guide-book, moreover, that has been seen to work in Strasbourg, and thus that he hopes will be equally effective in England upon those whom, like the ‘stobborne Sonne’ of *A Breffe Dialogue* itself, ‘he wolde fayne brynge to the right vnderstondynge of a christen mans lyvyng.’<sup>384</sup>

Roye is, however, aware that England is not Strasbourg. He is conscious of the fact that, as yet, the appearance of English New Testaments in England has not prompted the hoped-for spiritual revolution, and the responsibility for the failure of that revolution to materialise he places firmly at the door of the English ecclesiastical authorities, their campaign to suppress Tyndale’s translations, and, by implication, the effectiveness of that campaign. ‘Oure labour and stodye’ in producing the New Testaments, Roye argues, ‘vnto theym that presume and thyncke

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<sup>383</sup> *Breffe Dialogue*, p. 157.

<sup>384</sup> *Breffe Dialogue*, p. 103.



theym selves alonly to be apostolicall men/ and spretuall doctours/ was moste odeous', and therefore:

without delaye/ in greate hatered and vennemous barkynge/ openly at paulis crosse/ did that was in theym/ to disannull/ forbidde/ and blaspheme/ the moste holyest worde of God/ fode of many a povre soule/ longe fammysshed with the sower dowe/ of their importable and dissaytfull traditions.<sup>385</sup>

Prohibition has not, however, been the sole strategy employed by the English regime, Roye argues. They have also attacked him personally, being 'nott aschamed to diffame' him through his father, who they are suggesting, Roye continues, was Jewish, thus begging the question 'what frute can soche a tre brynge forthe'? Despite feeling it necessary to respond to the accusation, Roye claims that 'I lytell regarde their heddy vndiscrecion', since, apparently, his heritage is well-known 'vnto all the nobles of the realme.'<sup>386</sup>

These two aspects of Roye's understanding of the strategy being employed against him – the effectiveness of the campaign of proscription being conducted in England, and the undermining of the authority of his argument through the defamation of his character – are crucial to the case that I am making: that *A Breve Dialogue* and *Rede Me* need to be considered together as a coordinated attempt to appeal to the 'common' people over the heads of Wolsey's administration. *A Breve Dialogue* is Roye's attempt to make the new theology available to an audience who either have not been able to read the New Testament, or, if they have, have failed to interpret it in the way that he, and Tyndale, had hoped, and is therefore accompanied by direct instruction on how its is to be read, modelled after the practice of Lollard communities. Thus whilst Roye does feel it necessary to make some adjustments to the tone and dynamics of Capito's original, he sees no necessity, as Anthea Hume notes, 'to make decisive doctrinal

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<sup>385</sup> *Breve Dialogue*, p. 99.

<sup>386</sup> *Breve Dialogue*, pp.99-100.

alterations.<sup>387</sup> But whilst *A Brefe Dialogue* can be viewed as relatively straightforward in both purpose and execution, as a work conceived of with a specific intent, which can be inferred from the main dialogue, but is made explicit in Roye's prefatory material, *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe* is, by contrast, much more difficult to deconstruct. Although its intended readership is the same community to whom *A Brefe Dialogue* is expressly addressed, *Rede Me* seeks to achieve a number of results amongst that audience. It aims to propagandize, politically no less than theologically, and to present to an English audience an account of the reformist movement and the attempts to quash it, both home and abroad, written from the evangelicals' perspective. But it is also an attempt both to position that reformist movement within the context of an English radical tradition, and, fundamentally, to establish, in a prefiguration of Protestant teleological providentialism, a coherent, single 'radical tradition' in which to place it.

This multiplicity of purpose means that *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe* is a more complex, and, in many ways, a much less coherent piece than Roye's *Brefe Dialogue*. A brief overview of its overall structure gives some sense of the various disparate elements of which it is constructed, but which do not, necessarily, go to make up a single unified whole. *Rede Me* opens with a title-page image subverting Wolsey's coat of arms, a parodic reimagining of his insignia, from the six axes of which are added falling drops of blood. Above the image, Roye and Barlowe assume the voice of Wolsey 'I will ascende makynge my state so hye, / That my pompous honoure shall never dye.' Below it, Roye and Barlowe respond to the words that they have put in Wolsey's mouth: 'O Caytyfe when thou thynkest least of all, / With confusion thou shalt have a fall' (ll. 5-6).<sup>388</sup> The ensuing text, Douglas Parker suggests, can be divided into five separate parts: 'a title-page description, a prefatory letter, a preface in the form of a short dialogue, a

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<sup>387</sup> 'Roye's "*Brefe Dialogue*"', p. 314.

<sup>388</sup> In quoting *Rede Me*, I follow the line numbering in Parker's edition.

lamentation, and a major dialogue which is itself divided into two large sections.<sup>389</sup> However, *Rede Me* in fact concludes with a companion-image to that with which it began, although in this instance it is the Pope, Clement VII, rather than Wolsey, who is the target of *Rede Me*'s invective.

This final image, not, as far as I have been able to establish, given much consideration in previous studies of *Rede Me*, does deserve closer examination. Like the opening image, it features its intended victim's insignia – in this case the papal coat of arms – with an explanatory verse which, beginning above the arms, reads:

Christ goddes sonne, borne of a myden poore,  
Forto save mankynd, from heven descended.  
Pope Clemente, the sonne of an whoore,  
To destroye man, from hell hath ascended.

and concludes below:

In whom is evidently comprehended.  
The perfett meknes of oure saveoure Christ,  
And tyranny of the murtherer Antichrist. (ll. 3713-9)<sup>390</sup>

In textual terms, therefore, this final page is not dissimilar to the title-page in its execution: its objective's arms are enclosed within a framework of scathing personal abuse, in this latter case focusing on Clement's illegitimacy, although here is also reiterated an association between pope and antichrist that had long been a commonplace of anti-papal rhetoric.<sup>391</sup> However, where Wolsey's insignia itself is satirised by the addition of blood dripping from his axes, Clement's symbol is altered only by omission. *Rede Me*'s image follows the standard papal arms in presenting a pointed shield beneath the papal triple tiara; a pair of crossed keys run behind the shield, flanking the tiara at the top and joined by a rope at the bottom; a stole descends from the

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<sup>389</sup> *Rede Me*, p. 5.

<sup>390</sup> The image itself is reprinted on the facing page.

<sup>391</sup> See, for example, Curtis V. Bostick, *The antichrist and the Lollards: apocalypticism in late medieval and Reformation England* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

tiara and wraps around the keys. The single alteration to Clement's design is to the shield itself: where in his insignia, the shield is emblazoned with a version of the Medici family crest (in this case, five red besants below a single, larger, azure besant containing three golden fleur-de-lis), the version reprinted at the end of *Rede Me* is completely blank. The meaning of Wolsey's satirised symbol is laid out over three stanzas, informing readers that, for example, 'The sixe blouddy axes in a bare felde / Sheweth the cruelte of the red man', that 'The sixe bulles heddes in a felde blacke / Betokeneth hys stordy furiousnes', and that 'The cloubbe signifieth playne hys tyranny' (ll. 10-22). Clement's empty escutcheon, by contrast, receives no explanation.

Despite Roye and Barlowe's apparent reticence, this vacant visual space does, I would argue, deserve some attempt at analysis, however speculative that that is, necessarily, bound to be. One possibility is that its very emptiness *is* the joke. In this reading, Roye and Barlowe present a papal arms which symbolises the emptiness of papal claims: of Clement's to Peter's throne, and of the papacy's to its divinely appointed right to rule all Christendom. However, this interpretation would depend upon accepting that in producing this single image, *Rede Me*'s authors are displaying a satiric subtlety which is evident nowhere else in the text. It would suggest a confidence in their readership's ability to understand an inferred parodic statement unprompted when, in all other respects, *Rede Me* spells out its message with an unambiguous and blunt trenchancy. More likely, I would suggest (although, of course, this can be no more than a suggestion), is that Clement's empty shield represents an editorial decision made by *Rede Me*'s printer, Johann Schott. Whatever offensive reworking of the Medici family crest Roye and Barlowe intended to have used may have proved too much for the Strasbourg printer, for whom affronting the seemingly-distant Wolsey may have appeared less risky.

There is precedence for this sort of excision of contumelious anti-papal imagery by German printers: the whore or beast of Babylon in Lucas Cranach the Elder's famous woodcuts for the first edition of Luther's German New Testament translation, the 1522 'September Testament', wears the papal triple tiara. However, as Mark Edwards notes:

As a result of objection from such worthies as Duke Georg of Albertine Saxony, the upper two crowns were excised already in the second edition published in Wittenberg in December 1522. Most of the reprints elsewhere also omitted either the woodcut series in its entirety or offered copies without the offending tiaras.<sup>392</sup>

Moreover, as Miriam Usher Chrisman notes in her study of the significance of books in the Strasbourg reformation, although the early 1520s saw Strasbourg printers producing much anti-papal material, including direct attacks upon his person as well as his office, and, intriguingly, calumnious dialogues, 'after 1523 this campaign was dropped and anti-papal propaganda did not appear again until after the Council of Trent.'<sup>393</sup>

Nevertheless, whilst the possibility that Clement's empty shield was the product of a failure of nerve on the part of *Rede Me*'s printer can only be proffered as the most tentative of speculations, the existence of the two images within which the treatise's text is bounded does offer surer evidence of its intended audience. Opening *Rede Me* with the crude reworking of Wolsey's insignia allows Roye and Barlowe to present one of the work's principal concerns – the cardinal's cruelty and corruption – in the most succinct and accessible of ways. Moreover, by offering explanatory text with the image, they exploit the potential provided by the dynamics between an audience with a range of literacies. The impact that such marriages of image and text could have has been discussed by Robert Scribner in the specific context of popular

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<sup>392</sup> Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 127. See also, Ian Boxall, 'The Many Faces of Babylon the Great: *Wirkungsgeschichte* and the Interpretation of Revelations 17', in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. by Steve Moyise (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001), pp. 51-68 (pp. 51-2). Schott reprinted Luther's Testament in 1522 as *Das neuw Testament Deutsch* (Chrisman, *Bibliography*, p. 92).

<sup>393</sup> Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Lay Culture, Learned Culture: Books and Social Change in Strasbourg, 1480-1599* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 158-9.

propagandizing during the German reformation: 'Pictorial representation', he argues, 'can be a crude and effective means of communication, but it can never escape the dangers of ambiguity.'

However:

the addition of the printed word enabled it to spell out its message unambiguously. It thus served as a meeting point between the illiterate, the semi-literate and the literate. For those unable to read, the message of a popular broadsheet could be read from the visual images alone. More effectively, its printed text could be read out by someone who could read, creating a situation of oral interchange which was probably the most powerful means of spreading the Reformation.<sup>394</sup>

The striking images with which Roye and Barlowe open and close *Rede Me* are best interpreted as their attempt to exploit this propagandic power, with Wolsey's gory axes offering a visual representation of his bloody tyranny easily understood. Doubtless whatever the authors had planned for Clement's escutcheon would have offered a similarly straightforward illustration of their portrayal of the papacy.

The use of these images suggests that Roye and Barlowe anticipated an audience for their work having a range of reading-abilities, including those who, whilst unable to read the written word, might nevertheless be highly visually literate, and used to 'reading' images and signs, both in church and in daily life. More than this, however, it also suggests that they anticipated that their work would be read in groups of mixed literacy, that *Rede Me* could, almost literally, be Scribner's 'meeting point between the illiterate, the semi-literate and the literate.' Clearly, this is not as obvious a signpost of intended readership as, for example, that apparent appeal to Lollard readers from the preface to *A Breffe Dialogue*, but it certainly suggests a similar ambition. And if Roye and Barlowe's use of satirical images with textual explication gives an indication of the audience to whom *Rede Me* is purposed, that they adopt this visual tactic commonplace in

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<sup>394</sup> Robert Scribner, *For the Sake of the Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 6.

German Protestant printed propaganda of the period should also alert us to the significant local influence upon the text.

In composing *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*, Roye and Barlowe may have gained some inspiration from a popular prose dialogue by the Swiss artist and poet Niklaus Manuel, *Die Krankheit der Masse*, which appeared early in 1528, and in which, according to Charles Herford, ‘the mass was not only personified with extreme vividness and humour, but represented, in close analogy to Roy’s conception, as struck down with mortal illness, and making her last will.’<sup>395</sup> However, in *Rede Me*, the sickly mass is swiftly killed off, and its dialogue soon moves to other matters, suggesting, as Anthea Hume has demonstrated, that any impact that Manuel’s tract had upon Roye and Barlowe’s work was, at most, minimal.<sup>396</sup> Nevertheless, if the influence of *Die Krankheit der Masse* has, it seems, been overstated, what should not be discounted is the evidence that Roye and Barlowe were inspired by Strasbourg’s reformist movement more generally, and particularly the willingness of its protagonists to carry out their campaign through print.

This geographically-specific factor, largely ignored in previous analyses of *Rede Me*, begins to appear self-evident if we examine, for example, Miriam Chrisman’s assessment of religious publication in Strasbourg during the period. Chrisman draws a clear distinction between the largely latinate works of biblical exposition and exegesis produced for the Strasbourg clergy, and vernacular texts for the laity:

Scholarship for the learned; polemic for the common people. The new faith was not communicated in well-reasoned, dispassionate sermons or carefully argued doctrinal works. It was presented in polemical pamphlets that violently attacked Catholicism, the Pope, the bishops, and the teachings of the church [...] In the critical years of the

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<sup>395</sup> Charles H. Herford, *Studies in the Literary Relations of England and Germany in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1886), p. 40.

<sup>396</sup> Hume, *A Study of the Writings*, pp. 106-8. On previous analyses of the relationship between the two texts, see Parker, *Rede Me*, pp. 21-23.

new movement, from 1520 to 1523, the learned abandoned their roles as guardians of the culture to assault it from within, becoming publicists and propagandists for the new belief. Enthusiastic laymen joined the attack and printers diffused the tracts on a scale previously inconceivable.<sup>397</sup>

This was the publishing environment in which Roye and Barlowe found themselves in 1527, indeed, the environment in which Johann Schott, printer of both *Rede Me* and *A Breve Dialogue* operated.<sup>398</sup>

It was an environment, moreover, in which the impetus towards popular printed polemic can, at least in part, be ascribed to a recognition on the part of its promulgators of the desirability of marrying the new reforming movement with a distinctly satirical strain of popular oppositional sentiment. Strasbourg, in common with several other German cities, bore witness to both instances, and prohibitions, of what Robert Scribner describes as ‘anti-Roman carnival activity’ during the 1520s, including the mocking of the Catholic polemicist Thomas Murner with a carnival puppet in 1522, and the town council forbidding the parading of figures of the Pope and a cardinal in 1526.<sup>399</sup> And whilst, as Scribner’s work demonstrates, such unambiguously popular attacks upon Catholic institutions and individuals through physically expressed satire and parody were not new, evangelical print-propagandists made frequent use of their visual imagery in prints which might, for example, feature the pope as carnival puppet, or Luther’s opponents in animal masks.<sup>400</sup> If that imagery can be argued to have been drawing upon and redrawing popular parody as Protestant polemic, then I would suggest that *Rede Me* draws from the same well of popular satiric sentiment, taking not the imagery, but the language of common complaint as its inspiration. However, whilst *Rede Me* is, as I hope to further

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<sup>397</sup> *Lay Culture, Learned Culture*, pp. 155-6.

<sup>398</sup> The products of Schott’s lengthy career as a printer, thematically categorised, can be extracted from Miriam Usher Chrisman’s *Bibliography of Strasbourg Imprints, 1480-1599* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982).

<sup>399</sup> Robert Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London and Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1987), p. 73.

<sup>400</sup> *Popular Culture and Popular Movements*, pp. 71-102; *For the Sake of the Simple Folk*, pp. 59-94.



demonstrate, influenced by the conditions of its Strasbourg conception, that England is Roye and Barlowe's concern is underlined by the prefatory letter which follows its opening attack on Wolsey.

Where Roye's *Brefe Dialogue* commences with a relatively straightforward account of authorship, background and intent, *Rede Me* follows its title-page image, explained in three stanzas of rhyme royal, with a prefatory letter addressed not to the reader, but rather to a 'Master .P.G.', who has, the letter claims, sent the ensuing treatise from England to the letter's author, 'N.O.', in order that it might be printed on the continent (ll. 29-31). Douglas Parker, following Gordon Rupp and Edward Arber, argues that this device is a 'blind', designed to suggest an English origin for *Rede Me* that would direct attention away its exiled authors.<sup>401</sup> Such subterfuge may indeed have played a part in Roye and Barlowe's strategy, but I would argue that this false derivation serves a purpose more central to Roye and Barlowe's strategy than simply that of disguising *Rede Me*'s authorship. Although Roye and Barlowe do, as will be developed, address the European movement towards religious reform, and, equally, the continental campaign against the new heresies and their promulgators, their focus in doing so is upon England, upon the lessons that English reformers, and those who might be won over to their cause, can learn from both their continental counterparts and the conduct of their Catholic opponents. And whilst Roye and Barlowe do have an interest in providing this European context, they do so only to draw attention to the extent to which, as they would see it, England has failed to make the progress towards religious reformation enjoyed in the countries of their exile. But it is also their intention to present *Rede Me* not as the work of disgruntled expatriates, reflecting upon English conditions from abroad, but rather to present it as as a reflection of English

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<sup>401</sup> *Rede Me*, p. 5; *Studies in the Making*, p. 56; *English Reprints*, vol. 14, ed. by Edward Arber (London: Murray, 1871), p. 7.

sentiment, of native dissatisfaction with the status quo. The prefatory letter is, then, a 'blind', but it is a blind the purpose of which is to disguise geographic, rather than authorial provenance.

However, whilst the prefatory letter attempts to camouflage *Rede Me*'s origins, it also reveals its purpose and prospective audience. It is to be thought of 'as a glas or myroure most cleare before all mens eyes' (ll. 85-6), through which 'shall sprynge grett frute vnto the fammished, and lyght vnto theym which of longe season have been sore blyndfolded' (ll. 41-2). It is, moreover, a specific constituency thus hoodwinked that *Rede Me* aims to enlighten: it is 'for the preservacion and tutell of the innocent and simple' that it seeks 'to declare the pestilent doblenes and decevable seduccion of the wicked' (ll. 138-140). Where *A Breffe Dialoge* was, as we have seen, the instrument through which Roye hoped that the 'meane' people 'myght be better prepared/ and taught [...] the profunde misteries and greate iudgementes of God', was, in other words, a theological preparative for the adoption of the new doctrine, *Rede Me* is intended to persuade those same people of the necessity of the rejection of the old. In seeking to encourage this rejection, moreover, *Rede Me* depends less upon asserting the fallaciousness of Catholic credenda, than upon forcefully pronouncing the Catholic hierarchy, from top to bottom, corrupt, and corruptive.

Roye and Barlowe's decision to adopt this two-sided strategy, polemic on the one hand, doctrine on the other, again displays the influence of *Rede Me*'s Strasbourg origins. There, as Miriam Chrisman suggests:

the new faith was not communicated to the laity in logical, carefully argued sermons or books of doctrine. It was communicated in polemical pamphlets that vigorously attacked Catholic doctrine, the pope, the bishops, and the central ceremony of the Catholic church, the mass. The printing presses made these pamphlets available, creating one of the first modern propaganda campaigns. The polemical works were followed by doctrinal treatises, also written and published in German, which introduced the new teachings with regard to justification by faith, penance, and the

Eucharist. Doctrinal treatises also addressed the role of Christians in society, their subordination to secular authorities, and their responsibility in the marketplace.<sup>402</sup>

This, then, is precisely the approach, if not the chronology, adopted by Roye and Barlowe: the straightforward and accessible doctrinal instruction of *A Breve Dialogue*'s catechism is followed by the combative polemic of the no less accessible *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*.

Whilst Roye and Barlowe were no doubt encouraged by the situation that obtained amongst reformist writers in Strasbourg and more widely on the continent, they were also, as has been noted, acutely aware that conditions in England were rather different. Thus whilst they may have been keen to follow local precedence in producing a fiercely polemical reformist tract, *Rede Me*, like *A Breve Dialogue*, had to respond to England. With this imperative, Roye and Barlowe use *Rede Me* to practise a series of vitriolic offensives upon those individuals that they name as responsible for English conditions, with Cardinal Wolsey singled out for particular abuse. Indeed, it is this last aspect which, for Gordon Rupp, sets *Rede Me* (for which he prefers the title *Burial of the Mass*) apart from other satirical treatments of Wolsey from the likes of Simon Fish, Skelton (of whose influence *Rede Me* bears occasional specific evidence), and Alexander Barclay:

none of them excelled the *Burial of the Mass*. Its author has no qualms, and he rushes into places too delicate for fools or angels, the effects of Wolsey's foreign policy, the Cardinal's private life, and even the relations between Henry and Katherine. It is an attack on the executive such as would have got its author into trouble in any century and any country.<sup>403</sup>

The vilification of the Catholic church, past and present, is, for the bulk of *Rede Me* ventriloquized through a dialogue between two priest's servants, 'Watkyn' and 'Ieffraye'. The two have overheard their master's 'lamentacion' for the death of the mass: a heavily ironic and

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<sup>402</sup> Miriam Usher Chrisman, 'Printing and the Evolution of Lay Culture in Strasbourg, 1480-1599', in *The German People and the Reformation*, ed. by R. Po-chia Hsia (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 84.

<sup>403</sup> *Studies in the Making*, p. 56.

none too subtle sequence of thirty-four rhyme royal stanzas in which he bewails that which he has lost by the passing of the mass. That the priest himself laments the loss of, for example, ‘our whores and harlotes’, ‘Our baudes and brothels’, and ‘Our bastards’ (ll. 148-154), all of whom were maintained, he says, by the mass, gives a sense of the relative crudeness of Roye and Barlowe’s approach at this point. The dialogue between Watkyn and Ieffraye begins with the former asking his companion why ‘oure master, / Thus with lamentable maner, / Most pitously complayne?’ (ll. 352-354), and this allows Roye and Barlowe to stage a discussion in which Ieffraye can instruct Watkyn, and *Rede Me*’s readers, in what it is that has brought about the end of the mass in Strasbourg.<sup>404</sup>

It is ‘In Strasbrugh’, Watkyn informs Ieffraye, ‘that noble towne’ (l. 460), where the mass has met its end, vanquished by its opponents, the learned clerks ‘Hedius, Butzer, and Capito, / Celarius, Symphorian, and wother mo’ (ll. 469-70). These, then, are key-figures in the leadership of the Strasbourg reformist movement; Caspar Hedio, Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito, were all, John Derksen notes, ‘Rhineland Erasmians of artisan stock’, and arrived in the city in 1523.<sup>405</sup> The spiritualist Martin (Borrhaus) Cellarius, whom Douglas Parker misidentifies as Johannes Cellarius, arrived later, in 1526, and soon developed a close relationship with Capito, who wrote the introduction to his 1527 *De operibus Dei*.<sup>406</sup> ‘Symphorian’, whom Parker was unable to trace, must surely refer to the local parish priest, Symphorian Altbiesser, also known as

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<sup>404</sup> The full abolition of the mass in Strasbourg did not happen until February 1529 (Euan Cameron, ‘The “Godly Community” in the theory and practice of the European Reformation’, in *The Reformation: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, ed. by Andrew Pettegree, vol. 2 (London: Routledge 2004), pp. 15-32 (p. 22)). However, progress towards that aim had been being made for several years, so, for example, as early as 1525, the city’s Magistrat issued an edict which, as Miriam Chrisman summarises, declared that ‘Since the priests no longer preached and fulfilled their responsibility for instructing the people in the Word of God, the Mass would perforce have to be abolished, and in all the parish churches of the city the preaching of the Word should be substituted for the Mass’ (*Strasbourg and the Reform* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 150). Indeed, for several years the condition obtained in which parish churches had abandoned the mass, but it continued to be observed in the cathedral and other great churches (*Strasbourg and the Reform*, p. 167).

<sup>405</sup> John D. Derksen, *From Radicals to Survivors: Strasbourg’s Religious Nonconformists over Two Generations, 1525-1570* (Utrecht: Hes and De Graaf Publishers, 2002), p. 27.

<sup>406</sup> *Bibliography of Strasbourg Imprints*, p. 337.

Symphorian Pollio, who had joined the reformist cause, and was among the first to follow Bucer's example in marrying in 1523.<sup>407</sup> Moreover, whilst these were all prominent men in the Strasbourg reformist movement, they were also, as Miriam Usher notes, key figures in the production and publication of evangelical propagandist texts.<sup>408</sup> Capito's work had been, as we have seen, the inspiration for Roye's *Brefe Dialoge*, but the example of the polemical and doctrinal works produced by the other reformists that Roye and Barlowe name seems likely to have provided the model for their own, limited, propagandist programme.

Having named the champions of Strasbourg reform, *Rede Me* moves to a description of the role of the ordinary people. 'What did then the temporalte', Ieffraye asks, 'Wolde they all there vnto agre, / With outen eny dissencion?' Watkyn responds:

As for the commens vniuersally,  
And a greate parte of the senatory,  
Were of the same intencion.  
Though a fewe were on the wother syde,  
But they were lyghtly satisfied,  
When they could nott goddes worde danaye. (ll. 476-84)

In this, Roye and Barlowe give what is probably a reasonably accurate picture of the attitude towards reform amongst the Strasbourg commons, although Lorna Jane Abray argues that the poorest amongst the Strasbourgeoisie's desire was for a reform as much societal as it was religious.<sup>409</sup> The city council, or Magistrat, appear to have taken a more pragmatic approach, seeing the evangelical reformers, with their insistence on obedience to temporal rule, as the best means of ensuring their city's stability. Indeed, Thomas A. Brady suggests that popular antipathy towards the Catholic regime in Strasbourg, and in particular the fear that that popular antipathy would find popular, violent expression, drove the Magistrat to large-scale ecclesiastical

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<sup>407</sup> *Strasbourg and the Reform*, p. 50.

<sup>408</sup> *Lay Culture, Learned Culture*, pp. 156-7.

<sup>409</sup> Lorna Jane Abray, *The People's Reformation: Magistrates, Clergy, and Commons in Strasbourg, 1500-1598* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 37.

reforms, such as the closing of convents in 1524.<sup>410</sup> Nonetheless, by the end of the 1520s it seems certain that the majority of Strasbourg's citizen, the Magistrat included, had come to accept the new, evangelical faith.<sup>411</sup>

However, whilst the Strasbourg Catholic hierarchy fought hard to resist these changes, Watkyn's description of their campaign is, I would argue, an attempt to conflate the Strasbourg situation with that in England. The bishop of Strasbourg, Watkyn suggests, 'spareth nott to course and banne' (l. 494) in his efforts to revive the mass. The bishop, Wilhelm von Honstein, had indeed attempted to suspend some amongst the reformist clergy from their benefices and clerical privileges in January of 1524, although this was in response to their marrying, rather than their campaign to have the mass removed, and was not, moreover, entirely successful.<sup>412</sup> Watkyn continues by stating that the bishop 'spendeth many a gulden, / To hange, morthen, and bren, / The masses aduersaries certayne' (ll. 497-99). But whilst opponents of the mass in England, whether evangelicals or New Testaments, might well burn, such punishments were not meted out in Strasbourg, a city where, with its governing Magistrat itself increasingly turning to the evangelical cause, they would have been unenforceable. There, the bishop's campaign to protect the mass was confined to little more than letter-writing:

The bishop addressed yet another letter to the [Magist]Rat urging it to retain the Masses in the name of God, the Holy Roman Emperor, and peace and unity. The bishop asked the cathedral chapter to add its protest to his own, but the canons [...] replied that they were uncertain about the matter and did not want to add to the agitation. The bishop therefore turned to the pope, the emperor, and the *Reichskammergericht* [the Imperial Chamber Court], but his request for immediate intervention was lost in the procedural maze of the imperial chamber.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Thomas A. Brady, *Ruling Class, Regime and Reformation at Strasbourg, 1520-1555* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), pp. 206-208.

<sup>411</sup> *The People's Reformation*, p. 40.

<sup>412</sup> *Strasbourg and Reform*, pp. 136-8. Chrisman notes that, whilst the Magistrat did not act to protect the reformists from the bishop's edict, 'neither was an attempt made to carry out the provisions of the ban.' They remained in their parishes, and several more amongst them married (p. 138).

<sup>413</sup> *Strasbourg and Reform*, p. 172.

But Roye and Barlowe are writing for an English audience who, were they to take the message of *Rede Me* and *A Breve Dialogue* onboard, might very well run the risk of being burned. Therefore, without ever expressly stating that Strasbourg reformers had suffered that fate, they nonetheless attempt to construct a parallel with England: like you, they tell their audience, the opponents of the mass in Strasbourg were threatened with death, but if you persevere, as they have, then you will succeed as they have. In this, *Rede Me* rewrites von Honstein as an English bishop, responding to the evangelical challenge as the English episcopacy do.

This, perhaps crude, attempt to overlay Strasbourg with England should alert us to a propagandic strategy which Roye and Barlowe frequently return to in the course of *Rede Me*. Their intention is to produce a text which is a rallying-cry for the cause of evangelical revolution in England, not a chronicle of that movement's success in Strasbourg, and they gather the ammunition for their polemical campaign from wherever they can. Where actual events and individual protagonists in the European religious schism can be made to serve their cause, they seize upon them, representing, or misrepresenting them, to the extent that they may be useful in persuading their intended audience. Thus, just as they champion the triumph of the Strasbourg preachers, but are unconcerned with rehearsing its theological underpinnings, they are similarly selective in their treatment of those ranged against reform. 'What made Iohn Faber and Emser,' Ieffraye asks, 'With their ayders Eckyus and Morner, / Did they vnto masse no socoure?' (ll. 536-8). Watkyn's response addresses not these conservative's well-publicised religious convictions, but rather their failure to physically come to the mass's aid.

Watkyn answers Ieffraye's question by stating that, whilst the named conservatives 'with wordes of greate boste, / They spared nott to sende their oste, / Threatenyng with fearfull terroure' (ll. 539-41), they would not attend in person, for reasons that he goes on to explain.

Emser's previous efforts in defence of the mass, Watkyn suggests, referring to Hieronymous Emser, who was indeed, for much of the 1520s, fully occupied in writing against Luther, had 'So greuously troubled his eyes, / And also encombred his brayne' that he was forced 'At home, a fole to remayne' (ll. 549-553); 'Flatteryng Faber, Full of disdayne' (l. 554), as Watkyn designates Johannes Fabri, is too busy to attend, fully occupied in dissuading his master, Ferdinand, 'from favourynge the godly trothe' (l. 559). Again, although Roye and Barlowe choose to represent Fabri's activities in the worst possible light – his efforts are to the purpose of preventing the Archduke reaching the evangelical truth – those activities, though selectively represented, are not invented, since, as Denis Janz notes, following his appointment as an adviser to Ferdinand in 1523, Fabri 'took every opportunity to confirm Ferdinand's opposition to the Protestant heresy, and his influence can be discerned in some of the latter's edicts.'<sup>414</sup> Continuing his response, Watkyn turns to the Catholic polemicist Thomas Murner, and the vigorous opponent of Luther, Johann Eck:

As for Morner, the blynde lawear,  
And Eckius the frowarde sophistrar,  
They have afore castynge wisdom.  
That in soche honorable audience,  
Wheare as wyse clarckes are in presence,  
They will nott very gladly come. (ll. 560-5)

Douglas Parker suggests that 'it is doubtful whether Barlowe and Roye have one particular disputation in mind between conservatives and reformers; more probably they are thinking of the series of debates that took place between the two groups.'<sup>415</sup> However, it seems to me highly likely that they *do* have a particular disputation in mind: that which took place in Berne in January 1528.

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<sup>414</sup> Denis R. Janz, 'Johannes Fabri of Leutkirch, 1478 – 21 May 1541', in *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. by Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas B. Deutscher, 3 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985-87), II, pp. 5-8 (p. 6).

<sup>415</sup> *Rede Me*, p. 174.



Two years earlier, in 1526, Johann Eck – Watkyn’s ‘Eckius’ – and Johann Fabri played key roles in a carefully stage-managed ‘disputation’ at Baden which was intended, principally, as the opportunity for the refutation of the Swiss reformer Huldrych, or Ulrich, Zwingli, and the reformed religious customs he had helped to introduce in Zurich. Zwingli did not attend, not least because, as George Potter notes, he was aware that, rather than joining an open debate, at the Baden conference, ‘he would be pleading before a tribunal consisting of his known opponents who had never shown any intention or desire to listen to any other side of the case.’<sup>416</sup> Faber and Eck controlled proceedings throughout, assisted by Thomas Murner [‘Morner, the blynde lawear’], satirist and religious conservative, who ‘prepared the case for his superiors.’<sup>417</sup> However, whilst the conclusions of the Baden conference were never in any doubt, by 1527, the Council of another Swiss city, Berne, had become sufficiently evangelically-minded to accede to the demands of the city’s guilds for a theological debate which was the mirror-image of that at Baden.

The resultant Disputation at Berne, of January 1528, was, Bruce Gordon suggests, ‘the high point of the early Swiss Reformation.’<sup>418</sup> It attracted what George Potter calls a ‘galaxy of Protestant talent’ in support of Zwingli, including Johannes Oecolampadius, Heinrich Bullinger, Ambrosius Blarer and, from Strasbourg, Bucer and Capito. The Catholic presence was, by contrast, minimal, and Eck, as Potter continues, ‘refused to attend for some of the same reasons

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<sup>416</sup> G. R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 231.

<sup>417</sup> *Zwingli*, p. 234. Murner no doubt seemed a particularly apposite target for *Rede Me*’s populist scurrility since he wrote repeatedly about the specific dangers he saw in allowing layfolk to become involved in public theological controversy. Indeed, as Mark Edwards notes, ‘so concerned was Murner about the subversive potential of airing such disputes in vernacular publications that he devoted a whole section of *Concerning Doctor Martin Luther’s Teaching and Preaching* to the proposition that “matters of faith should not be disputed before the ignorant common folk”’ (*Printing, Propaganda*, p. 62).

<sup>418</sup> Bruce Gordon, ‘Switzerland’, in *The Early Reformation in Europe*, ed. by Andrew Pettegree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 70-93 ( p. 81).

as had kept Zwingli away from Baden.<sup>419</sup> The result of the Disputation – a debate as one-sided as had been that at Baden – was ‘the transfer to the evangelical camp of [...] the most powerful of the Swiss city states.’<sup>420</sup> Berne immediately adopted the recommendations that had formed the basis of Zwingli’s argument in the conference wholesale:

The ministers would receive a short Order of Service (*Taufbüchlein*) which would tell them how to lead their congregations. The Roman mass was not to said, and altars were to be destroyed, and any remaining images were to be removed forthwith. The clergy were permitted, and even encouraged, to marry.<sup>421</sup>

The conclusion that it is to this specific disputation that Roye and Barlowe are referring begins to appear inescapable when we consider that it was in direct response to its results, and within a few days of its conclusion, that the Bernese Manuel produced *Die Krankheit der Masse*.<sup>422</sup>

Nevertheless, Roye and Barlowe’s intention here is not to give their readers an account of the Disputation of Berne, nor even to triumph in its success. Rather, the failure of conservatives like Eck to appear there suggests to them grounds upon which to base the sort of general mudslinging which is *Rede Me*’s dominant characteristic. In this can be seen a strategy that Roye and Barlowe frequently return to in *Rede Me*: they draw upon specific incident not because, in describing it they are confident that their audience will be won over to their cause, but rather as fuel for the *ad hominem* attacks which they believe will be more effective. A similar motivation can be discerned underpinning Watkyn and Ieffraye’s treatment of Erasmus. ‘Medled nott Erasmus in this matter’, Ieffraye asks, ‘Which so craftely can flatter, / With cloked dissimulacion?’ (ll. 566-8), as Roye and Barlowe’s enthusiasm for personal abuse overwhelms a narrative imperative which would suggest that the accusation of sycophancy should come from Watkyn, rather than the questioning Ieffraye. Erasmus had little time to defend the mass, Watkyn

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<sup>419</sup> Zwingli, p. 256.

<sup>420</sup> ‘Switzerland’, p. 81.

<sup>421</sup> Zwingli, p. 262.

<sup>422</sup> Herford, *Literary Relations*, p. 40.

responds, because ‘He was busy to make will fre, / A thyng nott possible to be, / After wyse clarckis estimacion’ (ll. 569-71).

In this, Roye and Barlowe are again drawing upon local inspiration. It was Erasmus’s 1524 work on the issue of free will, *De Libero Arbitrio* which prompted the Strasbourg reformers, particularly Capito, to finally break with their one-time hero.<sup>423</sup> In late 1524, Capito wrote to the Mulhouse reformer Nicholas Prugner:

Regarding Erasmus’ ‘free will’, it quite frankly pleases the flesh and human strengths sufficiently, and it will be responded to superbly in this regard by M. Luther; some who are lesser talents, but surely sufficient to tear that kind of smoke of his to pieces, may also go against it.<sup>424</sup>

But whilst the theological differences which have come to separate the Strasbourg reformers from Erasmus suggest to Roye and Barlowe a position on which he may be attacked, they show no interest in addressing that position itself. Rather, Watkyn continues, Erasmus ‘feareth greatly some men saye, / Yf masse shulde vtterly decaye, / Least he shulde lose his pension’ (ll. 575-7). Similarly, on the question of transubstantiation, Roye and Barlowe dismiss Erasmus as one who ‘hath in heis hedde, / Soche an opinion of the god of bredde’ (ll. 578-9) that he would rather die than admit that Christ was not corporally present in the sacraments.<sup>425</sup> They see no need to engage with Erasmus theologically – that is not the purpose of their tract – and thus confine themselves to dismissing Erasmus as an unquestioning enthusiast for a superstitious and idolatrous rite.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> For *De Libero Arbitrio*, see, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 76, ed. by Charles Trinkhaus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998). For an analysis of Erasmus’s position, see Manfred Hoffman, ‘Erasmus on Free Will: An Issue Revisited’, *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*, 10 (1990), 101-21. On the impact of Erasmus’s position upon the Strasbourg reformers, see *Wolfgang Capito*, p. 110.

<sup>424</sup> Letter cited in *Wolfgang Capito*, p. 110.

<sup>425</sup> Perhaps Roye and Barlowe had in mind the not insubstantial pension which Erasmus had been granted by Archbishop Warham in 1512, and which he continued to draw until his death in 1536 (Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 62, 98-99).

<sup>426</sup> Erasmus’s distinct discomfort with the inevitable questions that the Eucharist drew can be detected in a 1530 letter to the Bishop of Hildesheim: ‘Innumerable questions are asked – how the elements are transubstantiated; how

Roye and Barlowe are, understandably, disinclined to conduct a theological campaign against Erasmus's doctrinal position across the pages of *Rede Me*. It is not, as I hope I have demonstrated, intended as a place of theological disposition, or even disputation, but rather as an opportunity to assault the reputations of the opponents of their reforming cause. However, on one aspect of Erasmus's relationship with the Strasbourg reformist community, one which might seem to have offered the perfect justification for an attack on Erasmus's character, they remain curiously silent. Whilst it may have been Erasmus's position on the question of free will which prompted the Strasbourg reformers' final break with him, the relationship had already been severely strained by the acrimonious controversy that developed between Erasmus and Ulrich von Hutten. Hutten, who had, Barbara Könniker suggests, 'always considered Erasmus the founder and leader of opposition to the church', became increasingly antipathetic towards what he considered to be Erasmus's cowardly vacillation between the parties of conservatism and reform, and that antipathy he eventually expressed in his *Expostulatio*, which circulated in manuscript before being printed in Strasbourg in 1523.<sup>427</sup> Erasmus considered Hutten's attacks upon him as the actions of 'a friend turned all at once into an enemy', and responded to them bitterly in the *Spongia adversus asperigines Hutteni*, which exchange, Miriam Chrisman argues, 'created a break with the Strasbourg intellectual community.'<sup>428</sup>

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accidents can subsist without a subject; how the colour, smell, taste, quality, which are in the bread and wine before it is consecrated can remain when the substance is changed; at what moment the miracle takes place, and what has happened when the bread and wine corrupts; how the same body can be in the same place at once, etc? Such problems may be discussed among the learned. For the vulgar it is enough to believe that the real body and blood of our Lord are actually present' (James Froude, *Life and Letters of Erasmus: Lectures Delivered at Oxford, 1893-4* (London: Longmans, 1910), p. 386).

<sup>427</sup> Barbara Könniker, 'Ulrich von Hutten, 21 April 1488 – end of August 1523', in *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, II, pp. 216-220 (p. 218).

<sup>428</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, 'Catalogus Lucubrationum', in *The Erasmus Reader*, ed. by Erika Rummell (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 21-50 (p. 41); *Lay Culture, Literate Culture*, p. 152. Both Hutten's *Expostulatio* and Erasmus's *Spongia* are reprinted in *The Polemics of Erasmus of Rotterdam and Ulrich von Hutten*, ed. and trans by Randolph J. Klawiter (London and Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977).

However, Erasmus did not confine himself to attacking Hutten, who had, in any case, died shortly before the *Spongia* was published, but also those who had printed Hutten's work in Basel and Strasbourg. On 13 March 1524, Erasmus wrote to the Strasbourg Magistrat, and, having praised them for their support for 'the gospel cause', suggested that, whilst men might show their zeal for this cause in different ways, nevertheless, some amongst them 'undermine the good work that is done by others':

There is in your city one Schott, a printer, who among other things has recently published an attack on me by Hutten so devoid of sense that even Luther and Melancthon highly disapproved of it. Nor was this all: he has printed the same book secretly a second time, together with a scurrilous tirade by a man who must be touched in his wits, though its nature is such that it may do very great harm both to the humanities and to the gospel cause [...] Repeated precautions must be taken to prevent this licence, once overlooked, from breaking out in a direction which may spell disaster for your commonwealth. It will at any rate do the gospel cause no little harm, if men see that for the sake of the gospel the moral standards of that commonwealth are slipping.<sup>429</sup>

This Schott was, of course, Johann Schott, printer of both *A Breve Dialogue* and *Rede Me*. And if Erasmus's response here appears reasonably measured, a second letter concerning the printer that he wrote to Caspar Hedio in the summer of 1524 is considerably less so. In it, Erasmus reveals that he had not sent the first letter directly to the Magistrat, but rather had addressed it to Hedio himself, 'as being the one friend in whom I had wholehearted confidence', entrusting that, if Hedio found it to be too personally embarrassing to pass on to the city council, then he would suppress it entirely, as this, as Erasmus continues, 'would leave me free to take what decisions I might think best.' This, Erasmus argues, Hedio failed to do, accusing him of showing the letter to his printer, Johann Froben. Worse still, Erasmus continues, 'you gave Schott a helping hand to save him from a penalty.' As Erasmus's letter proceeds, it becomes clear that he is responding to

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<sup>429</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 10, p. 199. The 'scurrilous tirade' seems likely to have been Otto Brunfels' *ProUlricho Hutteno, vita defuncto, ad Erasmi Roterodami spongiam responsio* (*Bibliography of Strasbourg*, p. 329).

a now-lost letter from Hedio which must have defended Schott. This defence Erasmus counters with extraordinary astringency:

Schott, you say, has a wife and small children. Would this seem a sufficient excuse if he had broken open my chest and removed my gold? I hardly think so, and yet what he is doing here is far more criminal. Unless perhaps you think I count reputation worth less than money. If he has no means of feeding his children, let him beg. He is ashamed to, you will say. And is he not ashamed of outrages like these? Let him sell his wife's virtue, and seem to lie snoring in his cups as he winks at her lover. Monstrous! you cry. What he does now is more monstrous still. No law takes a man's life for selling his wife's virtue, but those who issue libellous publications are faced everywhere with capital punishment.<sup>430</sup>

Erasmus wrote to the Strasbourg Magistrat again on 23 August 1524, this time directly, and whilst this missive does not, as his letter to Hedio appears to do, argue that Schott deserves to be put to death, he nonetheless calls for Schott and Brunfels to face criminal prosecution:

If in your zeal for justice you allow no thief to go unpunished, how much more criminal is it so scandalously to attack a man's reputation, which is more precious than life itself! If he who strikes another man is duly chastised, what does he deserve who pours such criminal libels on another man's good name? [...] If you support the gospel, these are the men who undermine it. If you support the cause of public peace, we have here nothing but a hotbed of subversion. If you dislike a contempt for the open law, as you do with perfect right, the laws of every nation without exception include criminal libel among the most serious offences [...] For my part, I can endure injuries done to myself; but books of this sort earn no little unpopularity for your city, whose welfare I have so much at heart.<sup>431</sup>

The council's records show that Schott and Brunfels were called before the Strasbourg Magistrat shortly thereafter, and, as Miriam Chrisman notes, 'Erasmus' letters over the next few months reflect his obsession with the matter and his deep-seated hatred of Schott, who tried without success to have his side of the story presented to Erasmus.'<sup>432</sup>

Erasmus, then, undertook a personal campaign against Johann Schott, a campaign conducted, in part at least, in the most virulent personal terms, and one of which Schott was well

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<sup>430</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 10, pp. 333-4.

<sup>431</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 10, p. 327.

<sup>432</sup> Miriam Chrisman, 'Johann Schott of Strasbourg, 19 June 1477 – c. 1548', in *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, III, pp. 230-1 (p. 231).

aware. Yet whilst it might be expected that this would be precisely the sort of material which Roye and Barlowe would be eager to make use of, Erasmus's treatment of Schott is not mentioned in *Rede Me*, despite the fact that it would seem to offer the most straightforward of opportunities to undermine his reputation. Elsewhere, Roye and Barlowe are, as we have seen, more than willing to traduce their opponents' character for the benefit of their English audience, but here, where Erasmus's conduct does seem, at best, questionable, they remain strangely silent. Of course, it is possible that Roye and Barlowe were unaware of Erasmus's attacks upon Schott (although I would suggest that that is unlikely) and thus the suggestion that they actively chose not to mention them can only be a supposition. But even if that remains speculative, that which Roye and Barlowe do include in their treatment of Erasmus is marked by a degree of restraint that they do not extend to their other targets. Erasmus may be mistaken, they suggest, in his attitude towards free will and transubstantiation, but his commitment to the mass is merely a consequence of financial self-interest; his unwillingness to change is not born of theological conviction, but of personal vanity, and thus a decidedly worldly obstinacy prevents Erasmus from revising the writings which have won him such fame, since, as Watkyn states:

Also he hath geven soche a laudacion,  
Vnto the ydols of abhominacion,  
In his glosynge pistles before tyme.  
That yf he shulde wother wyse reclame,  
Men wolde impute vnto his blame,  
Of vnstable inconstancy the cryme. (ll. 584-9)

But whilst Erasmus is, in Roye and Barlowe's construction, compromised by his human failings, he is mistaken, rather than malificent; he is not, unlike, say, Wolsey, the 'Darlynge of the devill' (l. 3388).

Roye and Barlowe's relative restraint in their treatment of Erasmus, their unwillingness to attack him with anything like the degree of opprobrium that they heap upon their other targets is

doubtless in part a consequence of the ambiguity of Erasmus's own position between the parties of conservatism and reform. It is also, I suggest, a consequence of their awareness that Erasmus's writings, and particularly the imprecations of his *Paraclesis*, with its plea for popular Bible-reading, can be usefully employed in the service of the evangelical cause, despite Erasmus's protestations of neutrality. Roye clearly recognised such potential in the *Paraclesis*, as is evinced by his decision to publish the *Exhortation* previously examined. Moreover, Roye and Barlowe return to a vision of an English commons spiritually invigorated by access to vernacular bibles as *Rede Me* reaches its conclusion, a vision which, I suggest, is directly inspired by Erasmus's *Paraclesis*, and will be addressed to as we move to a consideration of *Rede Me*'s efforts to address English conditions.

The last of Roye and Barlowe's targets from amongst continental conservatives is Johannes Cochlaeus, for whom we might expect there to be reserved some particularly choice invective. It was, if Cochlaeus's own account is correct, he who had brought Roye and Tyndale's activities to the attention of the authorities in Cologne and England, forcing them to abandon their New Testament and flee to Worms. In his 1549 *Commentaria Ioannis Cochlaei, de Actis et Scriptis Martini Lytheri Saxonis*, Cochlaeus claims that, through his contacts with the Cologne printers, and the aid of a few tongue-loosening glasses of wine, he learned of the project being undertaken by two Englishmen, 'eruditos linguarum', and revealed it to the Cologne senator Hermann Rinck, whom he knew to be familiar with the English authorities, and of their counsel.<sup>433</sup> However, it seems unlikely that Roye was aware of Cochlaeus's role. *Rede Me* does criticize him for writing to 'Herman Ryncke, / Wastyng in vayne paper and yncke,' but this letter, it becomes apparent as Watkyn continues, was written 'Pomeranes epystle to corrupte' (ll.

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<sup>433</sup> Johannes Cochlaeus, *Commentaria Ioannis Cochlaei, de Actis et Scriptis Martini Lytheri Saxonis* (facsimile edition) (Westmead, Farnborough: Gregg International, 1968), p. 134. The relevant section is, as noted above, translated by A. F. Pollard in *The New Testament translated by William Tyndale* (pp. ix-x).



631-3). Roye and Barlowe are attacking Cochlaeus's 1525 *Responsio Ad Johannem Bugenhagium Pomeranum*, which itself was intended to refute an open letter to the English people by Johann Bugenhagen ('Pomeranus'), the 1525 *Epistola ad Anglos*, written, Ralph Keen suggests, 'ostensibly to express his joy that England was beginning to embrace the Christian faith, but also articulating [...] the substance of evangelical religion.'<sup>434</sup> Cochlaeus's *Responsio* is dedicated 'To Master Herman Rinck, golden knight, distinguished both in virtue and piety, counselor to those highest of princes, the most unconquerable Roman Emperor and the most serene King of England.'<sup>435</sup>

Whilst Roye and Barlowe may have been unaware of Cochlaeus's role in necessitating Roye's flight from Cologne, nonetheless, as their treatment of his *Responsio* demonstrates, they are well-informed of his activities, and use this knowledge as the basis of their abuse. Was Cochlaeus not there to defend the mass, Ieffraye asks,

A littell pratye foolysse poade?  
But all though his stature be small,  
Yett men saye he lacketh no gall,  
More venemous than any toade. (ll. 610-4)

This may appear to be little more than base insult, but what they consider Cochlaeus's venomousness is not entirely without foundation: Cochlaeus had a reputation for being particularly combative in his attacks upon Luther; indeed, Erasmus, Ilse Guenther notes, 'disliked and occasionally criticized the violent tone of some of Cochlaeus' polemical writings.'<sup>436</sup> Cochlaeus was unable to defend the mass, Watkyn explains, 'for he hadde a nother occupacyon, / Writenge to the englysshe nacyon, / Inuencyones of flatterye' (ll. 614-6), in the

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<sup>434</sup> Johann Cochlaeus, *Responsio ad Johannem Bugenhagium Pomeranum*, ed. and trans. by Ralph Keen (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf Publishers, 1988), pp. 11-12.

<sup>435</sup> *Responsio ad Johannem Bugenhagium*, p. 46.

<sup>436</sup> Ilse Guenther, 'Johannes Cochlaeus of Wendelstein, d 10 January 1552', in *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, I, pp. 321-322 (p. 322).

hopes of gaining ‘some promocion hastely’ (l. 619). Again, Roye and Barlowe appear remarkably well-informed: Cochlaeus was in regular correspondence with John Fisher and Thomas More from around 1525 onwards, and, as P. S. Allen remarks, he dedicated many of his books to English statesmen and men of letters: ‘Henry VIII, Fisher, Tunstall, More, Nic. West, bishop of Ely, and Robert Ridley.’<sup>437</sup> Moreover, where Allen describes Cochlaeus as ‘a controversialist of inexhaustible activity in defence of the papacy’, Roye and Barlowe provide a rather more pejorative description of his unflagging efforts, in which, ‘Continually he doth wryte, / Euer laborynge daye and nyght, / To vpholde antichristes estate’ (ll. 623-5).<sup>438</sup>

Cochlaeus’s English connections, and the suggestion that he writes in hope of reward from the English authorities, amongst whom ‘oure Cardinall, / With wother bishops in generall, / Love soche a fellow entierly’, allow Roye and Barlowe to switch the focus of their attention from Europe to England. They have, as we have seen, provided their readers with a polemical ‘potted history’ of the continental conflict and its key players, and in doing so demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of successful propagandizing. Their account is biased, exaggerative, partial and often actively misleading, but it is not entirely fantasy. In their attacks upon, for example, the characters of individual conservatives, they do not invent, but rather make of them caricatures, embellishing and exaggerating to satirical effect. They see no necessity to present their readers with doctrinal exposition, neither reformed nor Catholic, since that is not the purpose of *Rede Me*; instead, they represent the religious divide as a straightforward conflict between good and evil, the papal antichrist and his attendants ranged against the godly evangelicals. And, as they advance their attack to an English theatre, Roye and Barlowe employ the same technique to suggest that the conditions that obtain in England are no less Manichaeian.

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<sup>437</sup> ‘Johannes Cochlaeus’, p. 322; *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. by P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen and H. W. Garrod, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906-58), VII, p. 145.

<sup>438</sup> *Opus Epistolarum*, p. 145.

Here, Thomas Wolsey again becomes the focus of their invective, and in this Roye and Barlowe seize upon perceived flaws in the cardinal's character, many of which appear to have been, to some extent, common currency, at least in so far as contemporary satire, particularly Skelton's, would suggest. And, as with their description of continental conservatives, they demonstrate a keen eye for examples of Wolsey's actual conduct which, with varying degrees of exaggeration or emphasis, allow his representation as one who 'Vnto god [...] is so odious, / That nothyng can be prosperous, / Where as he hath governance' (ll. 974-6).

Roye and Barlowe facilitate the move to England through a discussion of the best place for the dead mass to be interred. The champions of the mass, Watkyn explains, cannot decide, but are considering Rome, Paris and England. This last location, Ieffraye replies, seems best in his 'folysshe coniecture', especially since 'theare is Sayncte Thomas schryne, / Of precious stones and golde fyne, / Wherein the mass they maye laye' (ll. 677-82). However, whilst we might expect this to be the point at which Roye and Barlowe would tackle pilgrimages and shrines, having briefly mentioned the incredible ostentation of Thomas Becket's, they swiftly refocus their attack upon the hierarchy of the English episcopacy. Where Watkyn presented Ieffraye, and *Rede Me*'s audience, with a reformist account of events on the continent, the roles are now reversed, and it is Ieffraye's task to explain precisely why England would be the appropriate place to bury the mass. In doing so, he is able to compound familiar topoi of anticlerical complaint with specific incident from the campaign to suppress vernacular bibles in England. Ieffraye opens by addressing the worldly wealth of the English church:

Morover theare is the Cardinall,  
Of whose pompe to make rehearceall,  
It passeth my capacite.  
With stately bissoppes a greate sorte,  
Which kepe a mervelous porte,  
Concernynge worldely royalte.

Prestes also that are secular,  
With monkes and chanons regular,  
Abownde so in possession.  
That both in welfare and wede,  
With oute doute they farre excede,  
The nobles of the region. (ll. 686-97)

The accusation, then, is that the entire Catholic hierarchy in England abounds in a wealth that it ostentatiously displays, an affectation for which Wolsey drew personal criticism, but which was, nonetheless, a well-worn criticism of a worldly priesthood.<sup>439</sup> Indeed, as Greg Walker argues in considering a similar passage from Skelton's *Collyn Clout*, 'satirists had made precisely the same points, in much the same language, about bishops and archbishops, cardinals and popes for centuries [...] Criticisms of clerical wealth, pride and ceremonial pomp were endemic to late medieval society.'<sup>440</sup>

Having thus invoked a charge at once traditional, but with a contemporary focus in Wolsey, Ieffraye swiftly moves to much more recent events. Watkyn questions whether the English episcopacy will be able to prevent the mass's burial since, 'The gospell by a commaundment, / To do it will strayghtly theym compell.' Ieffraye explains that 'They sett nott by the gospell a flye' (ll. 705-7), and that much is clear from the fact that 'they sett hym a fyre, / Openly in London cite' (ll. 711-2). The account of the burning of Tyndale's New Testament which follows demonstrates Roye and Barlowe's characteristic interweaving of fact, exaggeration and misrepresentation. When asked who bore responsibility for the burning, Ieffraye opens a lengthy attack upon Tunstal:

In sothe the Bisshoppe of London,  
With the Cardinalles autorite.

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<sup>439</sup> So, for example, the questions posed in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century *Jack Upland*: 'Frere, what bitokeneth youre greet hood, youre scapalarie, and youre knottid / girdel, and youre side and wide copis that ye maken you of so dere clothe, sith / lesse clothis and of lesse prijs is more token of povert?' (in *Six Ecclesiastical Satires*, ed. by James Dean (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991), lines 112-4).

<sup>440</sup> Greg Walker, 'Wolsey and the Satirists', in *Cardinal Wolsey: Church, State and Art*, pp. 239-260 (p. 242).

Which at Paules crosse earnestly,  
Denounced it to be heresy,  
That the gospell shuld come to lyght. (ll. 714-8)

Ieffraye's representation of Tunstal's sermon is grounded upon its actual circumstances and content, but alters the terms of its declaration, so that it is bringing the gospel to light which becomes the act of heresy, rather than Tyndale's translation itself. Ieffraye continues by suggesting that Tunstal condemned as 'heretikes excecrable', those 'Whiche caused the gospell venerable, / To come vnto laye mens syght' (ll. 719-21). Again, the move from the specific to the general rewrites Tunstal's admonition: it is not only those responsible for the burned New Testament – Tyndale and Roye – who are, for Tunstal, heretics, but anyone who attempts to bring it to a lay audience.

Roye and Barlowe's next move is to respond to Tunstal's specific criticisms of Tyndale's Testament. The bishop, Ieffraye states, 'declared there in his furiousnes, / That he fownde errores more and les, / Above thre thousande in the translacion' (ll. 722-4). On this question of mistranslation, Roye and Barlowe recognise the need to address an important argument in the strategy being used against them. Tunstal had, it seems, declared in his sermon at Paul's Cross that Tyndale's New Testament contained at least two thousand errors (a figure that Roye and Barlowe's exaggeration threatens to render ridiculous), and Thomas More argued that in it 'there were founden and noted wronge & falsly translated aboue a thousande textys by tale.'<sup>441</sup> However, as Morna Hooker notes, 'Pressed to enumerate them, [More] listed three: Tyndale's 'mistranslation' of three Greek terms which should, in More's view, have been rendered 'priest', 'church' and 'charity'.<sup>442</sup> Roye and Barlowe suggest that Tunstal had even less success; of the three thousand errors that they claim Tunstal said he had found, 'when all cam to pas, / I dare

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<sup>441</sup> Sturge, *Tunstal*, p. 131; *Complete Works of More*, 6, i, p. 285.

<sup>442</sup> Morna Hooker, 'Tyndale as Translator', *Tyndale Society Journal*, 22 (2002), 8-24 (p. 13).

saye vnable he was, / Of one errour to make probacion' (ll. 725-7). In this, then, Roye and Barlowe attempt to draw the sting from their opponents' disapprobation, and its dependence on the protestation that it is not a vernacular bible in principle to which they object, but Tyndale's supposedly error-strewn New Testament in particular.

Tunstal would, Ieffraye states, 'gladly soffre marterdome, / To vpholde the devyls fredome' (ll. 749-50), and by having Watkyn ask whether this martyrdom would sanctify Tunstal, Roye and Barlowe are able to conduct a switch, albeit a rather clumsy one, from an *ad personam* impugnement of Tunstal, to an attack upon orthodox religious practice, in the form of the veneration of saint's images. 'Why, makest thou hym a saynt?', Watkyn, asks. 'Euen soche a one as paynters do paynt,' Ieffraye replies, 'On walles and bordes artificially':

Which with myters, crosses, and copes,  
Apere lyke gaye bisshops and popes,  
In strawnge fassion outwardly.  
But they are ydols in effecte,  
Mamettes of antichristes secte,  
To blynde folke deceatfully. (ll. 752-60)

Roye and Barlowe feel it necessary to make this rather heavy-handed movement between a personal attack upon Tunstal's campaign against Tyndale's New Testament, and voicing opposition to the church's use of images, for, I would argue, two reasons. First, it can be viewed as an attempt to introduce an element of 'Lollard theology' into their diatribe, an attempt to position Tunstal as a champion of religious iconography, and thus, from a Lollard perspective, idolatry. This is not to suggest that objections to the use of religious images were not a frequent feature of European reformist complaint, and direct, iconoclastic action. Indeed, in Strasbourg, the reformist clergy made repeated declamations against images, upon which the Strasbourg citizenry frequently acted, and therefore Roye and Barlowe may be drawing, and offering, some inspiration, as earlier, from the city of their exile.

However, as Margaret Aston notes, whilst ‘it is true that Lollard thought on ecclesiastical imagery (as on other matters) was far from uniform or clear-cut’, nevertheless:

Opposition to images can be regarded as one of the most consistent features of the Lollard heresy, and was a criterion for distinguishing its adherents at the beginning of the movement and its end.<sup>443</sup>

If Roye and Barlowe have, as I suggest, a Lollard audience, or at least, an audience with Lollard sympathies in mind for *Rede Me*, then the inclusion of this apparent aside upon orthodox practice serves to position Ieffraye as very much of their camp. But interrupting their damning discourse on Tunstal, a theme to which Ieffraye returns immediately after his digression upon religious imagery also allows Roye and Barlowe to make a deliberate contrast between Tunstal’s banning of a Bible aimed at lay- and unlearned readers, and the church’s standard defence of Christian art against the charge that it encouraged idolatry. Gregory the Great famously wrote to Serenus, bishop of Marseille towards the end of the sixth century, defending the use of images:

to adore a picture is one thing, but to learn through the story of a picture what is to be adored is another. For what writing presents to readers, this a picture presents to the unlearned who behold, since in it even the ignorant see what they ought to follow; in it the illiterate read. Hence, and chiefly to the nations [*gentibus*; in this context, gentiles, pagans, but also nations outside the Roman republic] a picture is instead of reading.<sup>444</sup>

That defence, constantly repeated, as Kathleen Kamerick remarks, by medieval theologians, is returned to by Thomas More in his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, where he argues ‘where they say yat yimages be but lay mennes bokes / they can not say nay but that they be necessary yf they were but so.’<sup>445</sup> Roye and Barlowe’s apparent digression upon idolatry is, then, an attempt to refute this argument before it can be made; images are not laymen’s books, they are ‘ydols’. In

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<sup>443</sup> Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), p. 136.

<sup>444</sup> *Select Library of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, second series, vol. 13: Gregory, part 2*, ed. and trans by James Barmby (Oxford: J. Parker, 1898), p. 54.

<sup>445</sup> Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England, 1350-1500* (New York and Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), p. 1; *Complete Works of More*, 6, i, p. 46.

this attitude, Roye and Barlowe are perhaps once more demonstrating the impact that continental reformist thinking has had upon them. Certainly, their implacable opposition to holy images expressed here would seem to place them ideologically closer to, for example, Zwingli, who both preached and wrote against images, than Tyndale, who, in his *Answer unto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue*, argues against the worship of images and relics, but remains convinced that they are still able to fulfill useful didactic and commemorative functions.<sup>446</sup> Although Tyndale's description of such use is couched in personal terms, and makes no mention of the benefit to the illiterate, his justification nonetheless appears to invoke Gregory's:

If (for an ensample) I take a pece of the crosse of christe and make a litle crosse therof and beare it aboute me / to loke theron with a repentine hert / at tymes when I am moued therto / to put me in remembraunce that the body of christ was broken and his bloud shed theron / for my sinnes [...] then it seruieth me and I not it and doeth me ye same seruice as yf I red ye testament in a boke / or as iff the preacher preached it vnto me.<sup>447</sup>

For Tyndale, religious images and relics can be acceptable, but only if 'used' in the right way, only if it is they which are made to serve man's spiritual needs, rather than the reverse. And in his admission that they may do such service we might detect a suggestion of that same anxiety about the needs of the least learned that he expressed in his New Testament. There, Tyndale's confidence in the ability of that constituency to comprehend the Word unmediated is not absolute, and thus he calls upon 'them that are learned' to offer assistance.<sup>448</sup> Here, listening to preaching, and using religious iconography to reflect upon its subjects can help to perform the same service of 'remembraunce' as a passage from the gospel.

For Roye and Barlowe, Tyndale's New Testament is the only book that laymen need, and, if it is read in the way that they envisage, following the example of the Lollard communities

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<sup>446</sup> W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 34-6.

<sup>447</sup> *An Answer unto Thomas Mores Dialogue*, p. 58.

<sup>448</sup> *The New Testament Translated by Tyndale, 1526*, p. 555.



and the method laid out in *A Breve Dialogue*, then illiteracy will be no barrier to its comprehension. But that, of course, is precisely what Tunstal hopes to prevent, as they make clear: Tunstal will, ‘with tonge and porsse’, do his best, ‘To plucke the worde of god downe, / And to exalte the thre folde crowne, / Of antichrist hys bever’ (ll. 770-5). Once again, Roye and Barlowe realise the persuasive propagandic effect of basing their abuse upon actual events; Tunstal serves the papal antichrist, and it is he who is responsible for ‘a charge under payne’:

That no man eny thyng retyne,  
Of the gospel newly translate.  
And yf they presume the contrary,  
They lose their goddes with oute mercy,  
And their boddies to be incarcerate. (ll. 776-81)

That with which Roye and Barlowe charge Tunstal is, then, largely accurate: he has preached against Tyndale’s Testament; he has bought up copies in an attempt to suppress them; those caught in possession of it have been tried before him. The misrepresentation lies not in Tunstal’s actions, but in the explanation of their motivation.

Having thus, for the time being, dealt with the specifics of the English campaign against heresy, Roye and Barlowe develop a more general offensive against the English clergy, but one the focus of which is drawn largely on its ecclesiarch, Wolsey. But whilst a considerable proportion of *Rede Me* is devoted to defaming Wolsey’s person, this aspect of their satirical assault should not, perhaps, detain us overlong. It is a lengthy, and repetitious catalogue of a succession of more or less familiar accusations against a cardinal who is, Ieffraye proclaims, the worst tyrant, ‘sens Englande fyrst began’ (l. 858), and is to some degree indebted to John Skelton’s earlier satirical attacks on Wolsey. Greg Walker suggests that *Rede Me*’s authors ‘drew heavily on *Collyn Clout* and *Why Come Ye Nat [to Courte]*? in their arguments, choice of

language and images.<sup>449</sup> But whilst *Rede Me* contains enough examples of direct borrowings from those satires, and the earlier *Speke, Parott*, to demonstrate that its authors were indeed familiar with Skelton's work, and found in it useful material upon which to develop their own defamation of the cardinal's character, their re-presentation of Wolsey's abuses is not, in all cases, as straightforwardly reiterative as Walker's analysis might suggest.<sup>450</sup> Skelton, and Roye and Barlowe have very different audiences in mind for their respective satires: whilst Skelton may assume, as he does in *Collyn Clout*, the persona of the impoverished, unlearned country man, his writing is aimed at a readership of rather more elevated social status.<sup>451</sup> Indeed, as Jane Griffiths argues, whether in or out of favour at Court, 'Skelton's writing maintains its courtly focus.'<sup>452</sup> The audience whom Roye and Barlowe wish to reach is, as we have seen, of an altogether less privileged cast, and thus their treatment of Wolsey, even where it is demonstrably inherited from Skelton, reflects that. Mindful of their audience, or at least, their perception of that audience's capabilities, Roye and Barlowe have little time for inference or allusion; their accusations are direct and unambiguous.

This difference of approach between Skelton, and Roye and Barlowe, can be illustrated by their respective treatments of Wolsey's sexual impropriety, and his supposed responsibility for the execution of Edward Stafford, third duke of Buckingham. Skelton, it has been suggested, alludes to the relationship between Wolsey and Joan Larke, with whom he had two illegitimate children, Thomas and Dorothy Wynter, in *Speke, Parott*, referring to a licentious clergy who

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<sup>449</sup> Greg Walker, *John Skelton and the Politics of the 1520s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 152.

<sup>450</sup> John Scattergood draws attention to several examples in the notes which accompany his edition of Skelton's English poems (*John Skelton: The Complete English Poems*, ed. by John Scattergood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 470, 474, 492). See also Parker's notes in *Rede Me*, pp. 161, 173, 180, 187.

<sup>451</sup> On Skelton's audience see *Skelton and the Politics of the 1520s*, esp. pp. 53-123.

<sup>452</sup> Jane Griffiths, *John Skelton and Poetic Authority* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 9.

‘hauke on hobby larkes / And other wanton warkes / Whan the nyght darkes’ (ll. 191-5).<sup>453</sup> Roye and Barlowe’s approach is rather more blunt: ‘Hath he children by his whoares also?’, Watkyn asks, to which Ieffraye responds with the unambiguous, ‘Ye and that full prowldy they go, / Namly one whom I do knowe’ (ll. 1181-2), whose name ‘is master Winter’ (l. 1187). Roye and Barlowe have no desire to make their audience read between the lines, nor, perhaps, confidence in their ability to do so.

That same directness is evident when they turn to the matter of Edward Stafford, third duke of Buckingham (whom they misname ‘Henry’), executed for treason in 1521. The idea that Stafford’s execution was ‘a put-up job, either by Henry or by Wolsey’ has, as Peter Gwyn notes, a long history, and whilst Charles V’s alleged exclamation on hearing of Stafford’s death (‘a butcher’s dog has killed the finest buck in England’) is likely apocryphal, the suggestion that his execution was a product of the cardinal’s machinations had, as Barbara Harris suggests, some contemporary currency.<sup>454</sup> Indeed, Harris argues that the earliest sources of a tradition in which ‘nothing less than the malice of Henry’s all-powerful minister seemed adequate to account for the duke’s sudden and unexpected ruin’ were Buckingham’s son Henry, Polydore Vergil, and two ‘ballads’: *Rede Me* and the anonymous ‘An Impeachment of Wolsey’.<sup>455</sup> However, allusions to Wolsey’s supposed responsibility for Stafford’s death have been detected in Skelton’s satires. *Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?*, for example, opens with a description of current conditions at court, in which Skelton suggests:

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<sup>453</sup> See Scattergood, *John Skelton*, p. 467, n. 193. Quotations from Skelton’s poetry, and their line numbers, are from this edition.

<sup>454</sup> Peter Gwyn, *The King’s Cardinal: The Rise and Fall of Thomas Wolsey* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1990), p. 159. Gwyn argues convincingly against the view that Stafford’s execution represented little more than judicial murder; *The Victoria History of the County of Stafford*, ed. by William Page *et al*, 20 vols (London: Archibald Constable; for the Institute of Historical Research by Oxford University Press; for the Institute of Historical Research by Boydell and Brewer, 1908-84), I, p. 247; Barbara J. Harris, *Edward Stafford, third duke of Buckingham, 1478-1521* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), p. 203.

<sup>455</sup> *Edward Stafford*, p. 203. ‘An Impeachment of Wolsey’ is reprinted in *Ballads from Manuscripts*, ed. by Richard Williams, F.J. Furnivall and William Morfill, 2 vols (London: Ballad Society, 1868-73), I, pp. 340-63).

Marke well this conclusyon:  
Through suche abusyon,  
And by suche illusyon,  
Unto great confusyon,  
A noble man may fall,  
And his honour appall (ll. 17-23)

Again, Roye and Barlowe directly assert rather than imply: ‘a ryght noble Prince of fame / Henry the ducke of buckyngame, / He caused to deye alas alas’ (ll. 875-7).

In the examples above, then, Skelton, and Roye and Barlowe might be argued to be making use of the same source material – the knowledge of Wolsey’s relationship with Joan Larke and the illegitimate children that were its issue, and the rumours that he conspired to see Stafford unjustly executed – but presenting it for different audiences. However, their divergent approaches might also be explained by the different circumstances of their works’ composition. Skelton was not simply writing for the Court, but was also, in composing his satires against Wolsey in the early years of the 1520s, writing at a period when Wolsey’s political power was at its height, and although his attacks on the cardinal may have circulated in manuscript, they do not seem to have appeared in print until after Wolsey’s death. Whether or not Wolsey was aware of the poems, Skelton’s intention does not appear to have been to draw widespread attention to his supposed abuses. Greg Walker goes further, suggesting that ‘Skelton wrote against Wolsey for opportunist reasons; not from any strong conviction in a cause, but in order to attract patronage’, and thus when Wolsey himself offered that patronage, Skelton was happy to accept it.<sup>456</sup> By contrast, Roye and Barlowe, exiled beyond the reach of a cardinal who would see them burn if he could, are writing at a point at which Wolsey’s position was beginning to seem rather less secure, and with the avowed aim of ensuring that knowlege of his abuses, real and imagined, is publicized as widely as possible.

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<sup>456</sup> *Skelton and the Politics of the 1520s*, p. 189.

These above, then, might be argued to be evidence of authors using the same pre-existing material, but for different purposes and effects. More indicative of Roye and Barlowe's precise intentions are those occasions when they are demonstrably borrowing directly from Skelton. Thus, for example, in *Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?*, Skelton imagines Wolsey's reception in hell. Were he there, Skelton posits:

We nede never feere  
Of the fendys blake;  
For I undertake  
He wolde so brag and crake  
That he wolde than make  
The devyls to quake,  
To shudder and to shake. (ll. 975-80)

Indeed, so wicked is Wolsey in Skelton's construction that he would 'set hell on fyer', 'breke the braynes / Of Lucyfer in his chaynes' and rule in his stead. But this is hyperbole; Skelton's Wolsey out-Herods Satan for an effect of comic exaggeration bordering on farce. But when Roye and Barlowe borrow this scenario, they wish their audience to take it seriously, to understand that they actually mean it. If their Wolsey makes the same journey to hell, he will, Watkyn suggests, have a similar impact on its inhabitants:

Yf he be as thou hast here sayde,  
I wene the devils will be a frayde,  
To have hym as a companion.  
For what with his execracions,  
And with his terrible fulminacions,  
He wolde handle theym so.  
That for very drede and feare,  
All the devils that be theare,  
Wilbe glad to let hym go. (ll. 1079-87)

That, Ieffraye responds, will not happen, as, 'thou mayst be assured, / The devils with courssees are invred, / As authours there of with out fayle' (ll. 1088-90). Skelton does not imagine that his readers will take his words literally; Roye and Barlowe hope that theirs will, and therefore are

obliged to adapt Skelton's scenario, dropping the suggestion that Wolsey might outdo the devil himself, and providing his minions with a convenient immunity to Wolsey's maledictions.

Once Roye and Barlowe have exhausted their fund of anti-Wolsey invective, they move to a treatment of the behaviour of the religious orders in England which is no less strident in its abuse. The accusations that they make are the familiar tropes of anticlerical complaint: the monks and friars are indolent; they take food from the mouths of the deserving poor; they are not just sexually active, but sexually voracious, both with women from within and without orders, and with each other; they are avaricious, gourmandizers, and, above all, corrupt and corrupting. In contrast to their earlier representation of their opponents, here Roye and Barlowe see no necessity to anchor their propagandizing upon actual, particular events or people, but rather are content to repeat well-worn charges, albeit with their customary graphic exaggeration.

This, I would suggest, is an entirely deliberate tactic on Roye and Barlowe's part. By doing so, they hope to place their polemic within a framework familiar to its prospective audience, not only to counter the oft-repeated accusation of 'newfangledness' made against the reformers, but also to suggest that their grievances, or rather, Watkyn and Ieffraye's grievances, are simply against the latest incarnation of long-standing abuses. Recognizing the popularity of the literature of complaint as a genre, and particularly as a genre which appears to speak for, and, indeed, be spoken by, the poorest members of society, Roye and Barlowe hope to provide for their audience a familiar context for the remainder of their text, one which will make its very specific accusations no less shocking, but perhaps less open to doubt. In this, Roye and Barlowe are considering the readership's needs and tastes in a way which Tyndale and More, for example, fail to do. Whether their assessment of those demands is correct is, of course, debateable, but the

fact that they attempt to judge their market in such a way suggests that they have a much more individuated, reflective conception of ‘common readers’.

Roye and Barlowe use the familiarity of the form in which they present their argument to that readership as a means to render radical ideas more palatable. Having concluded their abuse of the fraternal and mendicant orders, they return to the reality of the banning of Tyndale’s Testament in England, and in doing so manage to represent the exhortation to popular Bible-reading which Erasmus made in his *Paraclesis* in a form which suggests that it is that to which the English ecclesiastical authorities are inimically opposed. Roye and Barlowe construct an imagined discussion between Wolsey and Henry Standish, bishop of St Asaph’s, who had preached against Erasmus’s Greek New Testament from St Paul’s Cross in 1521 and whom Erasmus considered an ‘egregious numskull’.<sup>457</sup> In their invented conversation, Standish, descibed by Roye and Barlowe as ‘Wone that is nether flesshe nor fische / At all tymes a commen lyer’ (ll. 3456-7), explains the threat that the English New Testament presents to the corrupt status quo:

For we are vndone for ever,  
Yf the gospell abroad be spred.  
For then with in a whyle after,  
Every plowe manne and carter,  
Shall se what a lyfe we have led.  
Howe we have this five hondred yeres,  
Roffled [tangled] theym amonge the byres,  
Of desperate infidelite.  
And howe we have the worlde brought,  
Vnto beggery worsse than nought,  
Through oure chargeable vanite. (ll. 3542-3548)

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<sup>457</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus, Vol. 6: The Correspondence of Erasmus, Letters 842 to 992, 1518-1519*, trans. by R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson, annot. by Peter G. Bietenholz (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 13-14.

The concerns attributed to Standish here, with a commonalty newly scripturally informed and invigorated by Tyndale's Bible, are precisely analogous to the 'uneducated' labourers Erasmus targeted in his *Paraclesis*, the 'plowman' and 'wever' of Roye's translation.<sup>458</sup> This use of an allusion to the *Paraclesis* is not, I would argue, simply a case of Roye and Barlowe commandeering Erasmus to serve their own agenda, nor just the employment of a commonplace metonymic representation of the commonalty (although, to some extent, it is both of these). Rather, what they recognize in Erasmus's exhortation is that, were his earnest admonition to succeed, the result might achieve not only the revival of Christian conduct that was Erasmus's avowed aim, but also the possibilities for a religious radicalisation of the people through reading. Where Erasmus envisages the spread of Bible-literacy as enriching a universal Christian commonwealth, in which, 'all the communication of the christen shuld be of the scripture / for in a maner soch are we oure selves / as oure daylye tales are', for Roye and Barlowe, scriptural enlightenment is a means to the spiritual politicisation of the people, a politicisation which will, naturally, turn them against the religious establishment.<sup>459</sup>

However, elsewhere in *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*, Roye and Barlowe conduct a similar operation, extrapolating the consequences of another Erasmian exhortation, this time drawn from the preface to his paraphrase of Matthew, to reformist conclusions. Watkyn and Ieffraye contrast the refusal of the English authorities to countenance vernacular editions of the Bible with their apparent acceptance of popular secular stories in print, just as Tyndale did. Ieffraye caustically dismisses the conduct of the English bishops, who have, 'nowe restrayned / Vnder the payne of

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<sup>458</sup> William Roye's *An exhortation to the diligent studye of scripture; and, An exposition in to the seventh chaptre of the pistle to the Corinthians*, ed. by Douglas Parker (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 77

<sup>459</sup> *Exhortation*, p. 77.



courssynge. / That no laye man do rede or loke / In eny frutfull englisshe boke / Wholy scripture  
coucernynge’:

Their frantyke foly is so pevisse,  
That they contempne in Englisshe,  
To have the newe Testament.  
But as for tales of Robyn hode,  
With wother iestes nether honest nor goode,  
They have none impediment.

Not only is the Church indifferent to the publication of immoral secular literature, ‘Ieffraye’ continues, but it actively promotes its own ‘madde vnsavery teachynges’ and ‘fantasticall preachynges / Amonge simple folke.’ These writings, Ieffraye says, ‘no cost they spare nor stynte / openly to put theym in prynte / Tredyng scripture vnder their fote.’ Through these publications, ‘their decrees and decretall / With folysshe dreames papisticall / They compell people to rede.’ (ll. 1422-1441)

In this, then, Roye and Barlowe actually go rather further than Tyndale, or, indeed, Erasmus. They make the same connection between a church which carelessly allows its congregation to consume unsavoury and untrue tales of Robin Hood and the like, and yet forbids the reading of Truth, but suggest that the Church is actually actively involved in producing and forcing people to read ‘vnsavery teachynges’ and ‘fantasticall preachynges’ more harmful still. This is not the attack on the custom of leavening sermons with risqué material for the benefit of the common folk that we saw in Erasmus, but an attack on those religious publications which the English church was prepeared to accept: works like Mirk’s *Festival*, perhaps, or Jacobus de Voraigne’s *Golden Legend*. This is the church’s attitude to reading amongst the ‘simple folke’, Roye and Barlowe claim: they will allow you to read worthless secular texts; they will compell you to read what they claim are useful religious texts, but are in fact lies, yet they forbid you the one true and worthwhile work, the New Testament. More fundamentally, however, Roye and

Barlowe are simultaneously acknowledging the authority that the printed word grants those able to use it to promulgate their own agendas, and specifically the ways in which its power can be wielded over the 'simple folke'. They assert that the Church exploits the potential of print as an instrument for popular propagandising, perhaps with some justification. But that, of course, is precisely what they themselves are trying to do; the jaunty scurrility of *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*'s doggerel (or 'raylinge rymes', as Tyndale would have it) is no less an attempt to appeal to the broadest possible audience.

It is possible, then, to view *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe* as a pioneering piece of propaganda: Roye and Barlow recognize the possibilities of printed mass-production in producing and distributing a polemical message which, in its unconstrained offensive against contemporary English ecclesiastics and their conduct, is able to present an almost instant response to current events, and to present those events, carefully spun, to a particular audience. And they make that message palatable, defend it against the accusation of 'newfangledness' so often levelled against the reformers, by delivering it in the familiar form of anticlerical satirical tradition. In this, it is tempting to see in Roye and Barlowe an early illustration of what Sharpe and Zwicker describe as the 'long understood [...] ways in which the synchrony of print, Protestantism and humanism constituted a textual revolution, a radical transformation in the authorship and production of, and in the marketplace for, books.'<sup>460</sup>

This, as many commentators have noted, is not merely a commonplace of modern literary scholarship, rooted in the persuasive influence of Elizabeth Eisenstein's groundbreaking survey *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, but has been a cornerstone of Protestant myth since long before John Foxe asserted that:

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<sup>460</sup> Sharpe and Zwicker, *Reading*, p. 4.

I suppose this science of printing first to be set vp and sent of God to mans vse, not so much for temporall commoditie to be taken, or mans glory to be sought thereby, but rather for the spirituall and inwarde supportation of soulehealth, helpe of Religion, restoring of true doctrine, repaying of Christes Church, and redressing of corrupt abuses, which had heretofore ouerdarckened the doctrine of fayth, to reuiue agayne the lost lyght of knowledge to these blynde tymes, by reuuing of holsome and auncient writers: whose doinges and teachinges otherwise had lyen in obliuion, had not the benefite of Printing brought them agayne to light, or vs rather to light by them.<sup>461</sup>

Here, as Alexandra Walsham notes, Foxe is engaged in the establishment ‘of an intimate link between the triumph of Protestantism and the advent of print’, a supposed causal connection which was, as Walsham continues, ‘something of a topos in the writings of the continental reformers.’<sup>462</sup> In fact, Foxe is actually going rather further here: in invoking the ‘auncient writers’ whose work would otherwise have remained, necessarily, in obscurity, he claims a coherent and sanctified lineage for moveable type, its novelty serving not to innovate, but to revive and recover, to reveal a religious tradition but lately obscured. And whilst much recent scholarship, not least in the persuasive and detailed analyses of Walsham herself, has tended to question the accuracy of one-sided portrayals of early ‘print culture’ as handmaid to Protestantism (or vice versa), nonetheless *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe* forcefully asserts Roye and Barlowe’s determination to exploit the technology of print in a radical and radicalising agenda.<sup>463</sup>

If *A Breffe Dialogue* represents Roye’s desire to deliver the doctrines of a new theology to an audience of ‘meane’ or ‘common’ people for whom Scripture, even vernacular Scripture, was inaccessible, *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe* aims to conduct a similar political operation. Douglas

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<sup>461</sup> John Foxe, *The vvhole workes of W. Tyndall, Iohn Frith, and Doct. Barnes* (London: John Daye, 1573) (STC 24436), Sig. A2r.

<sup>462</sup> Alexandra Walsham, ‘“Domme Preachers”? Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the Culture of Print’, *Past and Present*, 168 (2000), 72-123 (p. 72).

<sup>463</sup> See, for example, ‘“Domme Preachers”’, and, ‘Unclasping the Book? Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the Vernacular Bible’, *Journal of British Studies*, 42 (2003), 141-166.

Parker notes the ‘indirect way in which *Rede Me*’s theological underpinnings are articulated’, arguing that

Its highly satiric and irreverent tone evident in its scathing denunciations, diatribes, and blasphemous references, as well as its approach to Roman Catholic doctrine and practices – an approach based on reaction – makes it difficult to define clearly its theological positions or to see a particular theological school at its root.<sup>464</sup>

However, to some extent, that is precisely Roye and Barlowe’s point. Roye has already produced the text which demonstrates his ‘theological position’, and the position that he wants his readers to adopt: it is *A Brefe Dialoge*. *Rede Me*, as its authors make absolutely clear, is intended ‘to declare the pestilent doblenes and decevable seduccion of the wicked’ (ll. 139040). It is, moreover, designed to be read very differently from *A Brefe Dialoge*; designed to be read in the way which Roye suggests is the ‘meane peoples’ wont: by ‘hastly rennyge there over.’

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<sup>464</sup> *Rede Me*, p. 24.

## Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to trace the ways in which individual writers have constructed and responded to their conception of popular readers and readerships over what might appear to be a very short period of time. As I hope my brief excursion into the moral condemnation of medieval romance demonstrated, the question of what people might, or should be reading, especially when it was conceived of in contradistinction to approved religious writing, did not suddenly arise with the printing press. Nor did it disappear after England's break with Rome, nor even once English vernacular Bibles did become widely available. However, my wish to focus on that seemingly limited period is a reflection of fact that it was during the half-century or so between Caxton establishing his press in London and Tyndale printing his English translation of the New Testament that three profoundly important cultural forces began to assert their influence on English – indeed, western – life: print, humanism and Protestantism. And each of these cultural forces, the technological, the pedagogical and the spiritual, are connected, both to each other, and collectively, by their revolutionary impact on reading.

Print enabled an exponential increase in the availability of texts, and provided the means by which individual texts, or perhaps more properly, individual's texts, and thus ideas, could be accurately reproduced and distributed. But the commercial imperative which encouraged printers like Caxton to set up their presses meant that, despite the appearances of the dedications which appeared in many of the works that they produced, they were compelled to consider the requirements not of individuals, but of a 'reading public'. As we have seen in the case of Caxton and his *Book of Curtesye*, that new reading public was not necessarily a particularly extensive group in size nor social demographics; printing, after all, made books cheaper, but it did not make them cheap. Moreover, it might be argued that Caxton was responding not to the needs of a

new market of readers, but rather was trying to create that market, was suggesting to an urban, mercantile audience that the texts that he reproduced were what they *should* be reading. The reading scheme which Caxton promoted was a conservative one, one in which the literary tastes of readers from amongst the social elites were offered as the example upon which a bourgeois readership might model their own. But for all its conservatism, Caxton's programme was simultaneously radical: it suggested that the reading-habits of the nobility, like their dress, manners, and speech did not have to be inherited; they could be learned.

The relationship between humanism and reading is, of course, self-evident. It was, after all, an intellectual movement founded upon reading, one which valued texts rather than tradition as the loci of intellectual and spiritual life. And whilst, as my early chapters on Vives and Erasmus have, I hope, demonstrated, when humanist writers addressed the reading of others, their principal concern was with intellectual and social elites, nonetheless anxieties about the reading-habits of a broader demographic insinuate themselves into their works. For Vives, the traditional model of womanhood in which it is their sexual, rather than their economic or social estate which defines them means that, although his *Instruction* is predominantly concerned with noble women, he believes that its lessons apply to all. Moreover, his conception of the woman reader, a conception in which she is eminently capable of absorbing that which she reads, but congenitally incapable of valuing it for herself, of discriminating between good and bad is no less universal. Erasmus, at least in terms of his pedagogical writings, is similarly focused upon noble, elite audiences, although, as we have seen, when considering the manner in which children and young people learn, he is prepared to concede the appeal of the products of popular culture. However, it is when he turns his mind to the matter of the commonalty's engagement with scripture that Erasmus begins to directly address the subject of a popular audience (although

not, it should be added, address that popular audience itself). Erasmus champions popular Bible-consumption in the *Paraclesis* which accompanied his New Testament, but it is in his Paraphrases on Matthew that he actively engages with how that might happen. His New Testament may have been the scriptural copy-text which, ultimately, allowed that engagement between the people and the Word to come about, but his *Paraphrase* demonstrates his active concern with bringing the unmediated Bible to an audience of the literate, semi-literate and entirely illiterate.

However, whilst Erasmus's proposed programme was eventually acted upon in England, the popular audience of his *Paraphrase* is a projection, a hypothetical commons who will, he anticipates, gratefully, or at the very least, obediently, receive the scriptural instruction that his programme will provide. But the consequence of William Tyndale's realisation of Erasmus's vernacular Bible, the consequence of the prospect and then reality of a general population to whom a decipherable Bible was beginning to become available was a challenge to a notional construction of popular Bible-readers. Both Tyndale and his opponents were forced to consider the prospect of an audience who might not simply accept the Word, but who might actively seek to engage with it, to interpret, to theorize, to make connections and to ask questions, and that possibility raised anxieties on both sides. Although they never express it as such, the concern shared by both Tyndale and More is, then, that the common people will begin to read the Bible as humanists might, an undertaking which, they both suggest, those common people, lacking the appropriate (humanist) education, are intellectually unequipped to make. For Tyndale, the danger is in the words: words which have new meanings, which are now obscure, or, worse still, have multiple readings. Despite his alleged declaration, Tyndale's confidence in the ability of the 'boy that driveth the plough' to read the Bible correctly unaided is far from absolute. For More, the

danger is that the common people will approach the Holy Scripture as though it were a tale of Robin Hood, and by this he is not just suggesting that they will not treat it with an appropriate level of respect, but also that they will read it in the wrong way. Implicit in More's argument is the suggestion that the process by which educated intellectuals read, and the process by which the remainder of the population read are fundamentally different.

The prospect of the manner in which ordinary people *might* read are, then, a pressing cause of anxiety for both More and Tyndale. But Jerome Barlowe and William Roye are interested in the ways that those people *do* read. Following the model of popular polemical printing that they have seen contributing to the progress of reform in Strasbourg, they seek to deliver both doctrine and propaganda in a form which will be both accessible, and, to some extent, familiar to their intended audience. Moreover, the circumstances in which they imagine that their tracts will be read reflect their awareness of actual reading practices in the non-elite, heterodox communities of Lollards. Their scheme was, it seems, ultimately unsuccessful, since almost all copies of both *A Breve Dialogue* and *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe* been seized, on Wolsey's instruction, by the Cologne senator Herman Rinck by October 1528.<sup>465</sup> But in the scope of their ambition they are, I would argue, deserving of credit that they have rarely been given. The common readers to whom Roye and Barlowe address their texts are afforded a measure of identity as a distinct group, a group with its own tastes and practices when engaging with texts. Roye and Barlowe may not have had a particularly high opinion of the 'meane peoples capacite', but they did, at the very least, attempt to engage with them on their own terms.

My justification, then, for limiting my study to such a short chronological period is that within it, as I hope I have demonstrated, can be traced a movement from a book which purports to teach its audience how to read like the medieval nobility, through texts which are deeply

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<sup>465</sup> *English Reprints*, vol. 14, ed. by Edward Arber (London: Murray, 1871), pp. 12-13.



concerned with the effect that reading the wrong books, or reading the right books wrongly might have on popular readerships, to a pair of twinned texts which, their propagandizing impetus notwithstanding, bear evidence of authors beginning to consider the popular readership not as an empty, indiscriminating vessel, but as a constituency in its own right, as a community of readers with its own practices and proclivities. A corollary of the narrowness of my historical focus, however, has been that important issues remain unaddressed by my thesis. I am, for example, acutely aware that I have not examined the relationship between demands for lay access to vernacular bibles in the era of print with their earlier, Wycliffite expression, a relationship which both reformers and conservatives of the 1520s and 1530s frequently invoke. Neither, unfortunately, have I been able to examine the innumerable treatments of the subject of popular reading, and more particularly popular books, that occur throughout the remainder of the sixteenth century. These are frequently couched in similar bibliographic listings of '*pestiferis libris*' that we saw in medieval condemnations of romance, but are employed in the service of a wide variety of authorial positions: by Protestants attacking Catholic literary practices, in puritanical assaults on 'vulgar' customs, in personal disputes and more wide-ranging satires. However, what I hope that I have demonstrated is that, in the limited period that I have addressed, the conception of a popular audience of readers moves from one in which they are a potential market to be exploited, to an indiscriminate, and indiscriminating mass who cannot be trusted in their handling of texts, to one which, at least as far as Roye and Barlowe are concerned, is a community able to make demands of, and engage with, that which they read.

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